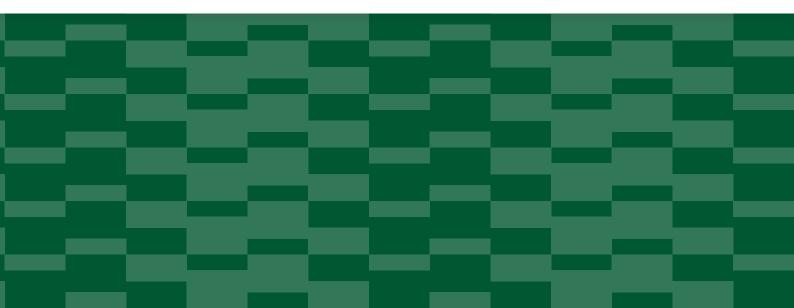# ENQA AGENCY REVIEW:
ARAGON AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STRATEGIC FORESIGHT IN HIGHER EDUCATION (ACPUA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015 ACPUA – Aragon's Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education - asked to be reviewed against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (the ESG) by a Panel appointed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The review was for the purpose of determining whether ACPUA would be compliant with the ESG and thus meet the criteria for membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and the requirement for registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). This followed a series of developmental steps taken by the Agency in previous years, notably since 2012, with the involvement of various stakeholders (including the Regional Government of Aragon) in order to adjust its procedures to the ESG in their revised version.

The panel performed a site visit in February 2016 and has found that in all areas ACPUA substantially complies with the European Standards and that in several areas it complies fully with those Standards.

In 2015, ACPUA has finalized its enhancement process and culminated its adaptation to the revised ESG through a set of final measures. These included a clear split of responsibilities, the integration of students in several areas of activity, a pre-adaptation to the revised ESG, and an attempt of developing greater internationalization of its activities. Several of these lines of development are expected to be strengthened by the current Strategic Plan (2015-18)[1].

ACPUA's activity can be classified in three main areas. Firstly, there are quality assurance evaluations and reviews of programmes, institutions and research. Secondly, there are strategic foresight activities through the production of reports and studies to support policy decisions, as well as research studies on key topics upon the regional authority's request. Finally, there are outreach activities through the promotion of quality culture in higher education. ACPUA performs a large variety of quality assessment activities that requires adaptation, flexibility, and responsiveness in order to optimize the use of resources and the coherence of different procedures.

The financial resources available to ACPUA are mainly provided by the regional Government and are conditioned by the constraints that have affected the economic situation at the regional and national levels in recent years. Although the leadership and the team of the Agency have been extremely efficient in using its resources, these are very modest given the variety of tasks to be performed.

ACPUA works within a complex regulatory framework at the Regional and National levels, though the Agency has strived to develop some adaptation to the regional specifities and needs, namely by developing a close collaboration with regional higher education institutions and with other stakeholders. Moreover, the Agency has started to collaborate with other regional agencies and this is a fruitful area for future developments and improvements.

The Panel hopes that its observations will be helpful to ACPUA as it will continue to consolidate as a member of ENQA.

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[1]

http://www.aragon.es/estaticos/GobiernoAragon/ACPUA/Documentos/Destacados_1ACPUA/150505_Plan%20Estrategico%20ACPUA.pdf

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of Aragon's Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (Agencia de Calidad y Prospectiva Universitaria de Aragón) ACPUA with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted in February 2016. The review was commissioned in view of the Agency's wish to become a member of ENQA, and to be registered in EQAR.

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 act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

ACPUA has been working towards becoming a member of ENQA and being listed on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) since 2012, thus it has been adjusting its processes and activities to the ESG. This has included organizational, legal, and management changes both in the Agency and in its regulatory framework. Following the approval of the revised ESG, ACPUA has also tried to incorporate those in its procedures.

As this is APCUA's first external review, the panel was expected to pay particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place, being aware that full evidence of concrete results in all areas may not be available at this stage.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2016 external review of ACPUA was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*[2] and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference for the review (see Annex 2). The panel for the external review of ACPUA was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Fiona Crozier (Chair), Head of International at The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, United Kingdom (ENQA nominee);
- Pedro Nuno Teixeira (Secretary), Associate Professor and Vice Rector at University of Porto, director CIPES, Portugal (European University Association nominee);
- Pieter-Jan Van de Velde, Independent Consultant on Quality Assurance, Belgium (ENQA nominee);
- Inguna Zarina, Member of ESU Student Experts' Pool on Quality Assurance and Student at the University of Latvia, Latvia (European Students' Union nominee);

ACPUA 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 the present final report

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[2] http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Guidelines-for-ENQA-Agency-Reviews.pdf

on the basis of the self-assessment report, site visit, and its findings. In doing so it provided an opportunity for ACPUA 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.

Self-assessment report

The self-assessment report was delivered on time and it was very informative, both regarding the trajectory of ACPUA and its current activities and procedures. It described the changes that have been implemented in ACPUA and in its regulatory framework in recent years, namely since 2012. Moreover, it also presented the major strategic goals for the Agency and the steps being developed towards its implementation. The self-evaluation process started in February 2015 with an initial diagnosis and SWOT analysis and this process was developed throughout the year. By September 2015 the draft version was presented to ACPUA's main bodies and stakeholders for internal and external feedback and its final version was submitted to ENQA by the following month.

The report starts by presenting higher education in Aragon, namely its legal framework, the number and type of higher education institutions operating in it, and the role of ACPUA since its establishment in 2006. Then it moves to a more detailed description of ACPUA's activities regarding quality assurance, though also mentioning its activities in strategic foresight and in outreach and communication. It also presents the Agency's organizational and governance structure, highlighting the major changes that took place since its early years up to its current status, notably its attempt of convergence towards the fulfilment of the ESGs. Then, the report presents an analysis of the extent to which ACPUA fulfils the revised version of Part 2 and 3 of the ESGs, which constitutes the core of the report and its more detailed and extensive sections. The report concludes with a self-reflection in which it takes stock of its recent evolution, but also its strategic goals for the coming years. The report is completed by several appendices that illustrate or complement some issues regarding ACPUA's quality assessment procedures such as templates of accreditation reports or agendas for site visits.

Overall, the report was very informative regarding the evolution of ACPUA and it provided an accurate overview of its procedures. The report also highlighted the growing organizational maturity of the Agency and its increasing capacity to develop a critical reflection about its activities and to implement measures to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. This self-evaluation process was recognized by the Agency as an important self-learning process providing helpful reflection about present and future goals and priorities. The self-evaluation process has also helped the Agency to strengthen its willingness and capacity to change.

Site visit

The Review panel spent three days in Aragon, arriving on the 17th of February and departing on the 19th of February 2016. During those days the panel had the opportunity to visit the ACPUA offices in Zaragoza (though the meetings were in a hotel nearby due to the small premises of the Agency). ACPUA 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. The visit was well planned and organized, with a very intensive agenda that included a site visit of the Agency's office facilities. The programme included interview sessions with members of the Governing Board, representatives of the regional Government of Aragon, the Director of ACPUA and a number of staff members, representatives of the

Advisory Board and the Agency's Appeal Committee, members of the various Technical Committees, and representatives of the Agency's Evaluation Committees. The panel also met various stakeholders, including representatives of the two higher education institutions located in the region, student representatives, and external stakeholders. A translator was present at all meetings. 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 related to level of compliance of ACPUA in relation to 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 ACPUA for factual verification in April 2016 and with reference to ENQA standards ACPUA was given two weeks to comment on the report. The detailed programme of the site visit is included in Annex 1.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ARAGON

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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 Aragon University System cover all academic fields, all levels, and all types of programmes.

Higher Education Institutions in the Region of Aragon offer two types of study programmes:

1. "Official" programmes, which are those that underwent the ex-ante accreditation and were formally "authorised" in the Autonomous Community where they are offered. These programmes are put on the national list of accredited programmes and lead to a degree that has administrative value in all Spain.

2. Programmes that lead to a diploma or qualification issued by the university itself, that are therefore called "títulos propios" (under the responsibility of the higher education institution itself, not the State); they may be for a very local audience or enjoy national/international prestige. These programs exist in particular at Master's level, which was not disseminated as an academic degree like bachelor and doctorate before the Bologna process was implemented.

Aragon's university system includes two universities - the University of Zaragoza (public) and San Jorge University (private). The former was founded in the XV century and it is one of the largest, oldest and most prestigious universities in Spain and comprises four campuses (Zaragoza, Huesca, Teruel, and la Almunia de Doña Godina). The San Jorge University is a recent private university, smaller, with two campuses (Huesca and Villanueva de Gallego). The following table provides some basic data about the two universities in the Region of Aragon.

Aragon university system in figures (2014-2015)	Bachelor's Degrees	Master's Degrees	Doctorates	Students	Teachers & researchers	Staff
University of Zaragoza	54	48	43	35,068	4,004	1,795
San Jorge University	12	10	2	2,042	253	100

Mention should be made as well to the presence of a so-called Campus of International Excellence, which is part of a national initiative entitled campus of excellence. In the case of Aragon this is called Campus Iberus and refers to a strategic alliance formed by the public universities of Aragon, La Rioja, Navarre, as well as the one of the province of Lleida in Catalonia, aiming at developing institutional collaboration between public universities of these four Autonomous Communities and possibly as well with French southern universities in the Western Pyrenees.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The National University Act (Organic Law 6/2001 of 21st December 2002) sets down basic regulations on a national scale establishing the powers and responsibilities of universities, the national Government and the different Autonomous Communities' Governments.

This law specifies for the first time that quality assurance and quality promotion is an essential goal of higher education policy, and that the functions of evaluation, certification and accreditation belong to "the National Agency for Quality Assurance (henceforth ANECA) and the evaluation bodies determined by each Autonomous Community's laws". Hence, the Aragon Higher Education Act (Law 5/2005, of June 14, on Universities) created in its Title IV the Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA) as the external quality assurance and evaluation body in Aragon.

ACPUA

ACPUA was created in 2005 and started operating in 2006. According to the law, the purpose of the Agency is double: an evaluation, certification and accreditation mission, as well as the promotion of continuous enhancement, reflection and innovation in the Aragon university system. ACPUA mainly develops technical quality assurance activities, such as evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation. This public service is complemented with strategic foresight and research, as well as with activities to promote a culture of quality in higher education within the region.

Since 2012, ACPUA has launched a deep process of internal evaluation and improvement aiming at membership of ENQA and registration on EQAR, implementing all reforms and mechanisms needed for the final alignment of its activities to the ESG. Back in 2013, ACPUA's Committee of Experts approved the first strategic document regarding the need to join ENQA. These recommendations were supported by the Agency's Board of Directors and ACPUA became an affiliate to ENQA in September 2013. Then, ACPUA created a steering group in October that year with internal and external members who designed an action plan aiming at enhancement in all areas, notably Transparency, Evaluation of satisfaction, Student engagement, Quality assurance evaluation processes, Internal Quality Assurance System, Reviewers, Communication, Accountability, Resources, and Technical committees. In 2014 ACPUA submitted a proposal for a legal reform to the Government of Aragon in order to adjust it to the ESG's requirements and enable its application to ENQA and EQAR. The reforms have aimed at

reinforcing ACPUA's accountability mechanisms, transparency, independence, and students' participation.

In 2014 and 2015, ACPUA has finalized its enhancement process and culminated its adaptation to the revised ESG through a set of final measures. These included a creation of three separate evaluation committees, the integration of students in several areas of activity (review panels, evaluation and technical committees, and Board of Directors), a pre-adaptation to the revised ESG, and an attempt of developing greater internationalization of its activities (notably through Seminars). Several of these lines of development are expected to be strengthened by the current Strategic Plan (2015-18).

ACPUA's ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

In recent years there were some adjustments in the structure of ACPUA, namely to adapt it to the requirements defined by the ESG and enable the application to ENQA. Among the major changes, mention should be made to the fact that the Board of Directors has delegated the power to dictate protocols to the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation, which is now fully responsible for designing the protocols. On the other hand, the Board has delegated its evaluation power to three independent Committees (Programmes, Institutions and Research). Besides, the changes led to the full integration of students in the Board, in the Commission, as well as in review panels and Committees. The current structure is presented is the chart below, extracted from the SAR:

The Board of Directors is the highest body of the Agency, being the governing Board of the Agency, and it is chaired by the Minister of Innovation, Research and Higher Education of the Government of Aragon. The Board of Directors defines the governing and strategic lines and it is made up of representatives of all stakeholder groups: Government, universities, students, social agents (business organisations, trade unions…) and experts. Currently it includes 17 people. Its main function is defining the general strategy of the Agency, including the approval of the annual plan and annual report of activities, budgets and financial reports, and strategic plans.

The management of ACPUA is led by a Director, who applies the policies in accordance to the strategic lines established by the Board. The Director is appointed to a four-year mandate by the regional Ministry of Innovation, Research and Higher Education, after consultation with the Board of Directors. The Director performs his tasks on a full-time basis and his contract can be renewed once. The Director appoints the members of the Commission of Evaluation, Certification, and Accreditation, following a proposal by the Committee of Experts. The Director is supported by technical and administrative staff, composed of six people and divided equally by each area. These are usually supported by two interns each year and are expected to be strengthened by two additional staff (one for each area).

ACPUA has a Committee of Experts composed of national and international experts. This Committee is in charge of providing advice and recommendations and supervising the enhancement of ACPUA's methodologies and activities. The Committee provides recommendations for the Director and Board of Directors, including in matters such as the Agency´s activity and structure. It also advises in the appointment of all assessment, certification and accreditation Committees' members (Evaluation Committees and Review panel members).

Regarding the technical bodies, the first one to be considered is the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation, which is ACPUA's technical committee in charge of evaluation, certification and accreditation. In order to carry out those responsibilities, this committee has the ability to create technical committees of experts (*subcomisiones*) for external quality assurance activities on the level of programmes, institutions and research. This committee is composed of six members: the Agency's Director (who chairs it), five experts in the field of quality assurance and assessment, and a secretary (appointed by the Director but without voting rights). Among the main functions of the committee are to produce the evaluation, certification and accreditation procedures and the required updates or modifications; to carry out ACPUA's technical function of evaluation, certification and accreditation throughout the creation of technical committees; and to provide advice about any related issue upon requests of ACPUA's Director or Board of Directors.

Another important body is the Appeals Committee, which is responsible for supervising the correct implementation of ACPUA's evaluation, certification and accreditation procedures. The members of the Appeals Committee are experts from outside Aragon and who are not part of any other committee of ACPUA. The committee is composed of a Chair (chosen by the committee among its members), three other experts (at least two of them have a legal background), and supported by a secretary from the Agency's staff (appointed by the Director but without voting rights). Among the main functions of the committee are: to report on appeals against ACPUA's final evaluation decisions (Director´s resolutions), to ensure the correct application of the protocols and without reassessment capacity; to inform about complaints and report to ACPUA's Director; and to provide support and advice about complaints, appeals or any other issue related to the guarantees and ethics of evaluation.

In February 2014 three Evaluation Committees were established by the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation, with the latter delegating all its evaluation, certification and accreditation functions to the Programmes Evaluation Committee, the Institutions Evaluation

Committee and the Research Evaluation Committee. The Programmes Evaluation Committee is composed of eight persons: six experts (one for each field of knowledge), a student with expertise in quality assurance, and a secretary from the staff of ACPUA (appointed by the Director and without voting rights). All of them are external to the Aragon higher education system and the member with highest category, seniority and age, in this order, acts as Chair of the Committee. The main functions of this committee are to produce evaluation reports (according to the protocols and methodologies) and to generate reports about the evaluation activity of study programmes (e.g., accreditation process, follow up process, and any other programme evaluation/review).

The Institutions Evaluation Committee is composed of six persons: four renowned experts, a student with expertise in institutional quality assurance, and a secretary from the staff of ACPUA (appointed by the Director and without voting rights). All of them are external to the Aragon university system. The main functions of this committee are to produce evaluation reports and to generate reports about the activity in evaluation procedures at the level of institutions. Institutions include centres, departments, and any other entity within or outside a university. The committee is in charge of evaluations on the creation and affiliation of university centres, feasibility of affiliated university centres, AUDIT and DOCENTIA programmes, , Training School Certification, Teaching staff evaluation system audit, and any other process at institutions level).

The Research Evaluation Committee is composed of six persons: five renowned experts (one for each field of knowledge) and a secretary from the staff of ACPUA (appointed by the Director and without voting rights). All of them are external to the Aragon university system. The main functions of this committee are to produce reports about the evaluation activity in research (namely University research institutes initial and regular accreditations, Junior academic staff research activity, Research projects evaluation, and any other evaluation processes related to research.

Review panels operate under the supervision of these three Committees. These are created ad-hoc for each evaluation process and are always made up of experts in quality assurance external to the Aragon university system. ACPUA carries out a selection of experts in accordance to the published Reviewers Selection Procedure. The main functions of the review panels are to participate in the corresponding evaluation process, perform the first evaluation, and submit their assessment to the corresponding evaluation committee (which generates the evaluation report). The composition of each review panel depends on the process, though a panel is usually made up of four people: a Chair (the academic member with highest category, seniority and age), an academic (expert in the area of knowledge covered in the review), a student (if the evaluation refers to programmes or other aims with a direct relationship to students), and a Technical Secretary appointed by ACPUA (usually, a QA Technician, who makes sure that the evaluation criteria and protocols are applied correctly, but without voting rights).

ACPUA'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

ACPUA's activity can be classified in three main areas:

- Quality assurance evaluations and reviews in three areas: programmes, institutions and research. Progressively, ACPUA has developed new evaluation tasks within each of them; programme evaluation is the most relevant one.

- Strategic foresight activities through the production of reports and studies to support higher education policy decisions upon request of the Aragon Government, as well as research

studies on key topics upon the authority's request.

- Outreach activities through the promotion of quality culture in higher education by organizing seminars, collaborating with other entities through networks, and participating in higher education events.

A - Evaluation at the Program level:

A1 - Activities developed by ACPUA:

- **Ex-post accreditation**: Programmes must undergo an ex-post review every four/six years (Masters/Degrees) after its initial accreditation. Seven criteria are subject to review (as agreed between Spanish agencies through REACU - Red Española de Agencias de Calidad Universitaria (Spanish Network of Agencies of Higher Education's Quality Assurance): Organization & curriculum implementation, Public information & transparency, Internal quality assurance system, Academic staff, Support staff, resources, services, Learning outcomes, Satisfaction and performance indicators. This process includes a self-evaluation report and a site visit by a review panel (with presence of a student) in order to interview key stakeholder groups (management, teachers, students, graduates, employers, support staff, etc.). The final result can be favourable, not favourable (programme's extinction) or favourable conditioned to an improvement plan (need for a specific plan for detected areas of improvement).

- **Follow-up/monitoring**: Programmes must undergo a monitoring process between the initial accreditation, the accreditation, and the subsequent accreditation renewals (four or six year periods, in any case). This quality assurance process focuses on ongoing improvement and reinforcement of the internal quality assurance system, especially in the areas of transparency and accountability.

- **Academic Plan proposals**: Due to a recent national Act (May 2015) the Academic Plan Proposal (Degree Programmes offer) of any new public or private university which wishes to settle in Aragon has to be accredited. This process was under development by ACPUA at the moment of the ENQA review.

A2 - Activities developed by ACPUA in collaboration with ANECA:

- **Ex-ante accreditation**: According to the Spanish legal framework, the initial (ex-ante) accreditation of study programmes is the only external quality assurance activity concerning programmes that can be carried out exclusively by EQAR registered Agencies. Thus, in Aragon, this activity is still implemented by ANECA. High-level art Master programmes are however an exception and Spanish Law assigns the responsibility for the initial accreditation of these programmes in Aragon to ACPUA.

B - Evaluation at the Institutional level:

B1 - Activities developed by ACPUA:

- **Non-higher Education Institutions**: ACPUA also performs activities with non-higher education

institutions, namely it has the mission to accredit pre-school, primary and secondary schools welcoming university students. This accreditation takes place upon the schools' voluntary request, and evaluates the quality of the internship placements of students enrolled in Education Degrees (Education Degrees and Master of Teaching) as interns. The supporting evidence for this accreditation is the self-evaluation report, reports from the Aragon Education Department, and ACPUA's programme reports (Follow-up/Accreditation). ACPUA awards accredited schools a quality label for three years, renewable after a follow-up.

- **Higher education institutions located outside Aragon**: ACPUA also plays a role if a higher education institution from Aragon agrees with a partner educational institution (public or private, in or outside Aragon) to carry out a study programme in multiple locations under the seal of that higher education institution. In this case, the educational authority must guarantee that the teaching and learning are implemented in these partner institutions with the same quality as at the university itself. ACPUA guarantees in a global manner this goal through the study programme accreditation, but is also responsible for this thematic evaluation (upon the educational authority's request) which focuses on feasibility, examining specific aspects. This process involves a self-evaluation report and a site visit by a review panel.

- **Research Institutes**: Another activity is the accreditation of University research institutes. There is an initial and an ex-post accreditation. ACPUA's initial accreditation (ex-ante) of university research institutes assures they meet all requirements to perform their research tasks in Aragon with quality. ACPUA's periodic accreditation (ex-post) of university research institutes operating in Aragon monitors their performance every five years. Both processes involve a self-evaluation report and a site visit by an external review panel. The research evaluation committee is in charge of making the final decision. In case of a final decision of "Favourable with recommendations", the process includes a follow-up process monitoring the implementation of recommendations.

C - Evaluation of Academic Staff:

C1 - Activities developed by ACPUA:

- **Regional programme**: ACPUA carries out a regional programme focused on teaching staff assessment. In order to assign extra productivity bonuses, awarded by the Aragon Government to public university teaching staff, the University of Zaragoza has developed an ad hoc teaching staff evaluation system. The Aragon Higher Education Act requires ACPUA to assure that this evaluation system works appropriately and according to the criteria approved by the Aragon Government.

- **Research by Junior Academic Staff:** ACPUA also carries out the evaluation of junior academic staff's research activities (for 6-year periods), though that activity does fall outside the remit of the ESG.

C2 - Activities developed by ACPUA in collaboration with ANECA:

- **DOCENTIA**: Besides those activities, ACPUA also performs several other activities. One of them being related to teaching staff evaluation. This is part of a programme called DOCENTIA and implemented through a cooperation agreement with ANECA. The goal of this programme is to support higher education institutions to foster the quality of their teaching staff professional competence evaluation systems. This audit provides a frame of reference for higher education institutions' internal quality assurance system and involves three phases: the system's external design evaluation (ex-ante), monitoring of implementation (ongoing) and certification of implementation (ex-post). The three phases include a self-evaluation report and an audit by an external review panel, and the last phase (ex-post certification of implementation) also incorporates a site visit.

As the aforementioned list indicates, ACPUA performs a large variety of quality assessment activities, which requires adaptation, flexibility, and responsiveness in order to optimize the use of resources and the coherence of different procedures.

ACPUA's funding

The financial resources available to ACPUA are mainly provided by the regional Government and are therefore conditioned by the constraints that have affected the economic situation at the regional and national levels since 2008. There has been variation in its budget since 2010, with cuts following the general pattern of the regional expenditure between 2010 and 2012 and some recovery since then. However, only in 2015 is the funding of ACPUA above the initial level. These cuts took place at the same time the Agency has been called to perform a growing set of activities in quality assessment. The Agency also envisages in its strategic plan to attain a higher level of funding up to 2018, though it is unclear how feasible it is to attain this through traditional revenues. Hence the Board is considering some revenue diversification, namely by providing quality assessment services to institutions and users outside Aragon.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ACPUA 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

ACPUA was established in 2005, though most of its current organizational and legal framework has been forged in recent years. Since 2012 the Agency has taken a series of initiatives, in several cases jointly with the regional Government of Aragon, aiming at aligning its procedures with the ESGs and in strengthening the depth and effectiveness of its activities. The measures taken include a significant reorganization of its structure, strengthening its independence vis-à-vis external stakeholders (notably the regional Government), the mechanisms on internal quality assurance, and the independence and consistency of its evaluation procedures. The establishment of three evaluation committees was a very important step in this respect.

ACPUA works in a highly regulated environment. Its purposes and functions are defined by the Aragon Higher Education Act (Art. 82). ACPUA's mission is to assure and promote the quality of the university system of Aragon. In order to achieve this mission, ACPUA mainly develops technical QA activities, such as evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation tasks. This public service is complemented with research and strategic foresight tasks (studies, reports, etc.), as well as promoting a culture of quality in higher education within the region.

Within the legal framework, the agency develops a strategic plan every four years, as well as annual activity plans. The legal framework, as well as the strategic and annual plans are publicly available on the Agency's website.

Although the work of ACPUA is significantly regulated by national and regional provisions, the Agency has developed extensive efforts to involve a variety of stakeholders in its activities, with particular emphasis in the case of students (with the help of the regional higher education institutions). This involvement of external stakeholders has been regarded by the Agency as providing a positive contribution and an opportunity to establish a dialogue with them and in making more clear the role and mission of ACPUA to the higher education system and to the region.

ACPUA has also strengthened the process of selection and training of experts, refraining from using those with apparent links to the region in order to strengthen the independence and objectivity of the procedures. The Agency has also strengthened its accountability and transparency, by promoting greater publicness of its protocols and by recently establishing an appeals committee.

A more detailed analysis of these issues will be presented in each of the items of Part 2 of the ESG. This analysis establishes the link between this standard (3.1) and standard 2.1.

Analysis

Based on its analysis of the documents provided and the meetings with the different stakeholders involved in the work of ACPUA, the panel concludes that the Agency has improved significantly the quality of its work over the past years, especially since it adopted the new strategy in 2012. Since then, ACPUA has implemented a broad range of organizational and procedural changes that have strengthened its independence, effectiveness, and robustness.

As the regional quality assurance agency of the Region of Aragon, ACPUA is the main actor in external quality assurance in this region. It undertakes a broad range of quality assurance activities, touching all levels and activities of the two universities and other independent educational and research institutes in Aragon. Although this broad range of activities may seem to create an overload of external procedures, the involved higher education institutions stress the added value of those procedures, as well as the constructive cooperation they experience with ACPUA.

The panel, however, considers that the breadth of activities developed and the limited resources hinders the possibility of deeper reflection about the Agency's role and self-improvement. Although the Agency is aware of that limitation, the panel considers that it should devote more time to this, notably by seizing the positive attitude existing in the Agency's team towards permanent improvement of its activities (as shown in recent years).

ACPUA is recognized by the HEIs and stakeholders in the region as contributing significantly to the development of a quality culture in higher education in Aragon. This was also achieved by a significant effort in involving different stakeholders in their quality assurance procedures, namely with the involvement of students and other stakeholders at the policy level. While the panel values the involvement of students in all quality assurance procedures which relate directly to the quality of education and teaching, the panel considers that it will be important to also involve stakeholders representing labour market and society in the evaluation procedures, which has merely been the case in the past.

Although the panel indicates a number of areas for improvement in relation to Part 2 of the ESG, the panel is convinced that the external quality assurance activities of the agency take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the ESG satisfactorily.

ACPUA complies fully with ESG 2.3 and 2.5.

ACPUA complies substantially with ESG 2.1., 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, and 2.7.

Commendations

The panel would like to commend the Agency for its new organisational structure which has introduced more clarity and transparency into the structure of the agency.

Recommendations

The panel recommends to further increase the stakeholder participation in its work, mainly through involving representatives of the labour market and society in evaluation panels and committees, wherever deemed relevant.

Panel's 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

The legal recognition of ACPUA at the national level is established by the National University Act 6/2001, of 21 December. Its article 31.3, on Quality Assurance, states that:

> « 3. The functions of evaluation, certification and accreditation correspond to the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain and to the evaluation bodies determined by Law by the Autonomous Communities (…) Thus, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain and the evaluation bodies created by Law by the Autonomous Communities in accordance with international quality standards, will establish cooperation and mutual recognition mechanisms »

In accordance to the national legislation, the Autonomous Community of Aragon approved the Aragon Higher Education Act 5/2005, of June 14, which created ACPUA as the responsible agency of external QA for the Aragon university system. From a legal point of view ACPUA is a public law entity, affiliated to the Aragon Government Department in charge of higher education (Department of Innovation, Research and University). Hence, the Agency has legal personality, its own assets and full capacity to fulfil its purposes.

ACPUA is the main instrument of the Autonomous Community of Aragon to promote the improvement of the quality of the Aragon's higher education system. According to the existing and aforementioned legal framework, ACPUA's main mission is "to promote and disseminate a culture of quality in the university and higher education area in general of Aragon, that enables enriching the reflection on the role of universities with regard to the society and favour the exchange of experiences at this level with other university systems." The structure and operation of ACPUA were initially developed by Decree 239/2006, of December 4, which approved the Agency's Bylaws, and then reformulated by subsequent legal changes, notably those taking place in 2014.

Analysis

The panel finds that the agency has a clear legal and formalised status and that it complies with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which it operates. During the visit, the panel met with the regional Minister and Deputy Minister in charge of Higher Education who expressed significant appreciation for the effectiveness and independence of the Agency and its contribution to the development of a quality culture in higher education in Aragon, to greater accountability of higher

education institutions towards society, and in promoting a more informed political discussion about higher education through its various activities. Moreover, they presented the renewal of the mandate of its Director (appointed by the previous regional Government) as an expression of that positive assessment. The panel has, however, discussed that it might be a challenge for the agency to continue to fulfil all the tasks required by the law, given the limited resources and expanded responsibilities that may follow the award of ENQA's membership. This will demand reflection on the part of the Agency about the effectiveness of its procedures (more on this below).

Panel's 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

ACPUA aims to develop its evaluation processes in relation to institutions and stakeholder groups, in order to ensure its independence and objectivity. The quality assurance processes developed by the Agency follow pre-defined and public evaluation criteria and protocols. There are different mechanisms in place in order to safeguard the absence of conflicts of interest, notably Aragon's Higher Education Act. In its article 83 this Act states that the Agency will develop the operations with organizational and functional independence and that the Agency must guarantee the objectivity and publicity of the methods and procedures it uses, as well as the impartiality of its governing and administration bodies. Moreover, article 93 states that the Agency's Bylaws determine the number of the evaluation, accreditation and certification committees that exist and their composition and functions, subject to what is stipulated in that Law. Those committees act with independence, approving the result of their actions, and are ultimately responsible for them.

Regarding operational independence, there is independence of the technical and evaluating bodies in charge of defining methodologies, writing evaluation protocols and issuing evaluation reports, as assured by the Aragon Higher Education Act (art. 85). Also following Aragon's Higher Education Act, the members of ACPUA's committees, panels and commissions act with full independence. The Agency has a careful policy for the selection of reviewers and committees' members that aims to safeguard evaluations processes and outcomes' independence and fairness. All reviewers should carry out their main professional activity outside the Aragon university system, in order to diminish any potential conflict of interests. Besides, belonging to a technical body of ACPUA is not compatible to being appointed in any one-person management position in any higher education institution subject to a review. The selection of reviewers and review panels is carried out following the published requirements, according to the corresponding evaluation protocol. A Committee is in charge of analysing and assessing the most suitable candidates for each of the review panels and presents those proposals to the Director of ACPUA.

Regarding independence of outcomes, the definition of procedures and protocols of each evaluation process is a responsibility awarded to ACPUA's Director, following technical recommendation by the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation. The decisions of review panels must be

reached through a consensus decision making process. Final reports of each evaluation process must be written by the corresponding evaluation committee by consensus following closely the review panels' initial assessment. The Evaluation Committees' evaluations or decisions cannot be modified by any other body. ACPUA's Director is in charge of signing the final reports as the ultimate responsible person of the process.

Regarding financial independence, ACPUA is a public entity sustained with public funds and these have been sufficient to the development of its activities, despite the difficult financial outlook faced by Aragon and Spain over the recent years. Due to this challenging financial context, the Agency has been considering possibilities to diversify its revenues. Thus, ACPUA is currently developing a policy on public prices, in order to provide services to institutions or users outside the Aragon university system and obtain alternative funding sources (see ESG 3.5 below).

Analysis

Given the evidence presented, the panel is satisfied that the agency's structure and legal status ensure its independent status and its operations are carried out with substantial independence. The guarantees for independence are well developed both in the legal framework and in the procedures that ACPUA has developed. Mention should also be made to the code of ethics that is required to be signed by staff and external experts.

Regarding operational independence, though the Director is appointed by the Ministry, the panel has found no sign of interference of the latter over the Agency's activities. Moreover, although there was a recent change in the regional Government of Aragon, the Director was confirmed by the new Government, supported notably by the positive assessment that was made by different stakeholders about the activity of the Agency and its current Director.

New structures have been designed in order to reach full independence in the design and implementation of procedures. The Board of Directors in which a balanced representation of the regional Government and all other stakeholders is guaranteed, has delegated its decision power on the development of quality assurance procedures to an independent Commission. This Commission designs the procedures, while the implementation is left to Technical Committees and panels. Those Committees and panels perform their activities in full independence. This operational independence and independence of outcomes was consistently stated by the different interviewees during the site visit. The fact that reviewers are always from outside Aragon and that no other body can change the reports of any bodies (stated in the law) are important safeguards in relationship to independence of outcomes. Thus, despite the small scale of the system and a certain degree of proximity with local higher education institutions, there is evidence of unfavourable decisions or more critical reports and there is a shared perception about the Agency's independence in this respect.

Regarding financial independence, the Agency is funded through a model of public funding. This has advantages and limitations, like any other of its alternatives (e.g., funded by the higher education institutions). The risks posed by financial restrictions on public funding have been a challenge to the Agency, but the panel has not found any evidence that it has affected it financial independence, notably regarding the way it administers its resources and it allocates them according to its needs and activities. Financial independence is limited as ACPUA is dependent from one funder, the regional Government, but the Government has shown a clear support for the organisation and has committed for a further growth in the budget and a 4-year financial plan, (after consultations with the Government of Aragon).

Commendations

The Panel would like to commend the Agency for including external experts outside Aragon and outside Spain in its structure, an important step that has contributed to making decision-making processes more transparent and to strengthening the Agency's independence.

Panel's conclusion: fully 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

ACPUA has tried to fulfil its mission and legal mandate through a wide range of activities. For instance, it places a significant emphasis in producing reports that may be useful for higher education institutions and for the region as a whole, namely by mapping trends, providing recommendations, identifying areas for improvement, or disseminating good practices that can contribute to greater quality in higher education in Aragon. The Agency publishes and disseminates summary reports on global results at the end of every programme accreditation process. Overall, ACPUA has tried to play an important role in developing useful information and data for a global analysis of the university system and to stimulate the higher education institutions located in Aragon towards quality improvement.

Since 2008, ACPUA and the other Spanish agencies publish and disseminate an annual Report on the status of External Quality Assurance in Spanish universities. ACPUA is also currently working in collaboration with other Spanish QA agencies on the design of a new University Information System, defining a set of indicators to reflect the reality with accuracy and reliability and allowing comparative research about the different university systems.

Furthermore, ACPUA has given attention to activities related to strategic foresight, carrying out studies upon request of the Aragon Government about different key topics, e.g. employability of university graduates, connections of higher education with other education levels, learning outcomes, etc. For the future, it is crucial for ACPUA to reinforce this area of work, given that it is an area very valued by various stakeholders.

Finally, ACPUA has been actively organizing seminars and workshops, which have proven to be a very valued activity by the different groups of stakeholders. They offer an opportunity for transferring knowledge and an open forum to reflect, discuss, and share ideas and perspectives on quality and improvement in a non-evaluating environment.

Analysis

The review panel has identified several instances through which ACPUA tries to achieve the goal of producing valuable reviews on different themes relevant to the higher education system of its region. This has been done either by the Agency itself or in cooperation with other regional agencies. Several reports have been produced based on the findings of individual evaluations or combining the best practices of a certain institution. Others discuss more overall findings on the Aragon university system. Overall, the efforts done in this area create a clear added value for the higher education system and broader society. Nevertheless, a more systematic approach would allow to further increase this added value. While during the first years of its existence, ACPUA focused on thematic reports, the constraints faced regarding resources (see below) have hindered the Agency's commitment to this area of activity when the number of other external quality assurance activities increased in recent years. Taking into account the expected increase in its activities in the future, the panel is unsure whether there will be enough resources to further develop the area of thematic analysis in a systematic way in the future. Many stakeholders mentioned the work of ACPUA in providing thematic analysis as clearly contributing to the quality culture of the higher education system in Aragon, while also pointing out that further growth in this area would be welcome. The panel therefore urges the Agency and the regional Government to invest enough resources to further develop this area.

Notwithstanding the room for improvement on the level of thematic reports, the monthly seminars should be mentioned as a good practice.

Commendations

The panel would like to commend the Agency for the organisation and facilitation of seminars and other dissemination activities which are clearly appreciated by stakeholders.

Recommendations

The panel encourages the Agency to sustain its efforts for different thematic analysis and to allocate resources to these activities as these may contribute to enhance the relevance and legitimacy of its role in promoting awareness and informed policies about quality assurance.

Panel's conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

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

Evidence

Since its establishment, the resources provided ACPUA have always come from public funding. Given the financial difficulties faced, since 2008, by both Spain and Aragon, there have been significant restrictions in public funding and in the allocations made to different agencies, which has also affected ACPUA. Despite those limitations, according to the data provided in the SAR, the budgetary situation

of the Agency has suffered less than the overall public sector as the Agency's resources have grown since 2010 by 4% (as opposed to the 15% reduction in the Aragon Government as a whole). Regarding financial resources, ACPUA's budget of 2015 amounted to 509.504€ and the Strategic Plan for 2015-18 indicates that further growth is expected in the coming years.

Regarding human resources, ACPUA is formed by seven employees – one Director, three technical staff members and three administrative staff members (the Agency is in the process of replacing one of its technical staff members that has recently left the Agency).

Analysis

This budget and the number of staff are modest in comparison to other Agencies and several of the interviewees have noticed the enormous challenges this represents to the Agency. Nevertheless, the size of the Aragon higher education system is also modest and the panel found consistent remarks about the effectiveness of the Agency in performing its tasks.

The panel was impressed with how the agency has dealt with its tasks given the financial and human resources it has been allocated. ACPUA has been very efficient in using its resources and has optimized them extremely well. However, the panel is concerned about the sustainability of the level of dedication it requires from each member and its adequacy given the likely expansion of activities. The current small team is highly appreciated, but might be too limited to continue offering high quality and to fulfil the Agency's established strategic objectives. Although the review panel must commend the Agency for its cost-effectiveness, it should also express its concern about the sustainability of those efforts and the limitations in making further gains in efficiency and effectiveness.

The representatives of the regional Government the review panel met during its site visit, including the Minister in charge of Higher Education, confirmed their ambition to slightly enlarge the human and financial resources of the Agency. The panel considers this to be welcome, and necessary, given the aforementioned constraints and the expected increase in its activities. Hence, the panel finds that the agency at the moment of the assessment has demonstrated that it has carried out its tasks with great professionalism and commitment.

The Agency expresses its ambition to develop activities outside the region of Aragon in order to reduce its financial dependence on the Government of Aragon. Although the panel appreciates the efforts to increase financial independence, it is convinced that achieving a significant income from activities in other regions will require important efforts. In other regions in Spain competition with the local agency will be difficult, because the local agency is often funded by the Government in order to offer its services for free. Another challenge will be to build positive and constructive working relations with universities outside Aragon, in order to create the same buy-in for ACPUA's activities as is the case in Aragon.

Recommendations

The panel recommends that ACPUA reflects about the necessary resources in the light of longer term achievement of strategic goals and the expansion of activities. Hence, the panel recommends that the agency tries to anticipate the impact of those activities on staff, not only in terms of staffing levels but also with regard to the need for staff development and training in order to manage transition effectively.

Also in relation to resources, the panel recommends that ACPUA considers the impact of the achievement of strategic goals on current activities and processes to ensure that it can adapt to work with possibly a larger number of stakeholders and also to the requirements of systems outside Aragon and Spain.

Panel's 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 Aragon Higher Education Act requires ACPUA to have an internal quality assurance policy in place. In order to respond to this mandate, the Agency established an internal quality assurance system certified by the internationally recognized ISO 9001:2008. This internal system aims to ensure a good performance of the Agency's quality assurance processes, guaranteeing the participation and engagement of staff as well as a commitment towards continuous enhancement.

The internal quality assurance system handles ACPUA's activities as a whole, setting indicators for each one of the processes for the purpose of their control. These indicators are reviewed quarterly by the Director. It ensures the monitoring and continuous improvement of all processes through a systematic meta-evaluation process after each implementation round. For all evaluation processes, the meta-evaluation includes gathering and analysing all participants' satisfaction (reviewers, reviewees, institutions, etc.) through surveys. There are also quarterly meetings of the Quality Committee (formed by ACPUA's Director, one Quality Assurance Technician, and the Head of Administration) to facilitate a follow up and continuous improvement.

Finally, the internal quality assurance system is subject to an annual audit (both internally and externally) since its start in 2009. The external audit is implemented by an auditing firm: once a year, an external reviewer carries out a site visit to the Agency and issues an auditing report pointing out areas for improvement. In December 2015, the certifying entity Bureau Veritas renewed the ISO certification, pointing out several strengths.

ACPUA requires that every reviewer/collaborator reads and signs the Code of Ethics, which includes a declaration of agreement and non-conflict of interests. ACPUA is also committed to professional ethics and concepts such as integrity, responsibility, accountability, independence and transparency, through which the Agency tries to develop a socially responsible attitude. This reveals itself in its voluntary adherence to several social responsibility initiatives, such as the Global Compact Initiative by the United Nations, the Luxembourg Declaration on Workplace Health Promotion in the European Union, and the drafting of a Sustainability Report since 2014.

Analysis

The growing maturity of ACPUA, especially in its recent years, has contributed to the development of a much more self-critical and reflective attitude towards its organization and its activities. Thus, the panel has identified a growing culture of self-reflection and improvement among ACPUA's staff and leadership. This view was also shared by the members of the different committees and review panels. Processes are evaluated and improved on a regular basis, mainly through informal feedback and the meta-evaluation processes.

In order to further increase the quality of its work, ACPUA invests in collaboration with the national agency ANECA and other regional agencies, with the ambition both to share its own expertise and to learn from others. Also the frequent seminars and events organized (jointly or independently) by ACPUA contribute to the learning environment.

Furthermore, the Agency has also taken positive steps regarding professional conduct, notably through a greater emphasis on the independence and objectivity of procedures, staff, and reviewers. This is particularly important given the small size of the Agency and the higher education system. This small size enhances the need of broader and more diverse benchmarks for its activities and procedures on quality assurance. The panel considers that the Agency has been strengthening its internal quality procedures, including external verification through ISO. The panel also welcomes the positive signs identified in the self-evaluation report and in the site visit (e.g., meta-evaluation, feedback from various participants, and the regular analysis of outcomes by the Quality Committee). It encourages the Agency to pursue further this effort of self-reflection and critical attitude towards its processes and procedures, notably towards greater collaboration with other Spanish Agencies and with non-Spanish Agencies. Moreover, and given the amount of work demanded by a small team, the Agency should pay attention to the need of finding some opportunities for critical reflection and devising ways of self-improvement.

Commendations

The panel would like to commend the Agency for the open and willing attitude of the staff to work with the university system and other stakeholders in Aragon as agents of change and development, particularly in terms of quality culture.

Recommendations

The panel recommends that ACPUA strengthens its collaboration with other Agencies to consolidate its achievements and to foster a continuous awareness about possible limitations, areas of improvements, and necessary changes.

Panel's conclusion: substantially 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

This is the Agency's first review as part of its evaluation process to gain ENQA's full membership and to join EQAR. In the future, the Agency is expected 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. This aspect has been included in the Aragon Higher Education Act, in the reform that took place in 2014. Accordingly, article 85 indicates that "Periodically and at least once every five years, the Agency's activity must be subject to an external evaluation by an international committee of experts".

Analysis

The review panel has confirmed the commitment of the Agency and of the regional Government of Aragon in following this ESG, expressed in the Higher Education Act, and also in the meetings during the site visit. The panel considers that the Agency is fully compliant in this respect.

Panel's 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.

Evidence

The activities of ACPUA 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 reviews to institutional reviews, and include as well several staff reviews. In the area of programme evaluation, the agency conducts two types of procedures: follow-up procedures and ex-post accreditation. The ex-ante accreditation is performed thus far by ANECA and, if ACPUA is granted membership of ENQA, it will also be allocated to the regional agency (as it happens already in other parts of Spain). Nevertheless, ACPUA already performs ex-ante accreditation of Master in the field of Arts. Moreover, the regional Government has required that for each new programme, ACPUA should produce a report that is cumulative to the one produced by ANECA. Finally, the Agency has signed an agreement in 2015 with ANECA for achieving the EUR-ACE and EUR-INF labels in Aragon.

In the area of institutional evaluation, ACPUA performs several types of reviews, some of which are done autonomously and others in collaboration with ANECA (and with other regional quality assurance agencies in Spain). Apart from the compulsory programme accreditation procedure, various voluntary procedures have been put in place at the national and regional level in order to foster the

enhancement of quality management systems; namely, AUDIT (accreditation of the internal quality management system) and DOCENTIA (quality assurance of teaching staff).

According to the data provided, the Aragon university system has performed reasonably well in relative terms (when compared to the rest of Spain), notably regarding its internal quality assurance systems. Thus, several Schools and Units of the two universities in Aragon have earned external validation such as the AUDIT certification (in the case of Schools or Faculties) and international labels (as in the case of management and library services). These quality distinctions of the Aragon university system benefited from the work done by ACPUA since the implementation of study programmes according to the Bologna Plan and the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area. Thus, ACPUA's evaluation protocols take into account the institutions' internal quality assurance systems and consider the evidences produced by those systems. These protocols are designed in consultation with the higher education community in order that the Agency's methodologies are coherent and reinforce institutions' quality assurance systems in their efficiency and efficacy.

ACPUA has been working towards the goal that its external quality assurance procedures are designed and carried out taking into account thoroughly the effectiveness of the internal processes described in Part 1 of the ESG. According to ACPUA, all the activities related to programme accreditation contribute to the 10 issues raised in Part 1, although the extent to which those topics are evaluated differs. In the case of those activities focused on institutions, they tend to focus more on the institutions' policy for quality assurance (1.1.), teaching staff (1.5.), learning resources and student support (1.6.), information management (1.7.), and public information (1.8.). Several activities contribute to foster institutions' participation in external quality assurance activities on a regular basis.

Alignment: ACPUA's evaluation programmes and ESG, Part 1 (extracted from the SAR)

ESG, Part 1: Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance	PROGRAMMES			INSTITUTIONS						
	1. INITIAL ACCREDITATION	2. FOLLOW UP	3. ACCREDITATION	4. UNIV. RESEARCH INSTITUTES INITIAL	5. UNIV. RESEARCH INSTITUTES ACCRED.	6. TRAINING SCHOOLS ACCREDI.	7. HEIS INITIAL ACCREDITATION	8. DOCENTIA	9. TEACHING STAFF EVAL. SYSTEM AUDIT	10. PARTNER HEI EVALUATION
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, certification	●	●	●							
1.5 Teaching staff	●	●	●					●	●	●
1.6 Learning resources & student support	●	●	●			●	●			
1.7 Information management	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
1.8 Public information	●	●	●		●			●		
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	●	●	●			●				
1.10 Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		

Analysis

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

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

ACPUA 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 (follow-up and re-accreditation). In the DOCENTIA programme the quality assurance policy on quality of teaching staff is tackled. Also in the evaluation of research institutes, their quality assurance policy is assessed.

Within the Spanish quality assurance system, the voluntary evaluation scheme AUDIT, which was established by ANECA, aims at helping Departments and Faculties to develop robust internal quality assurance systems. This started with a pilot phase in 2013 with 7 Spanish Universities (2 of which located in Aragon). The University of Zaragoza has seen one Faculty/School receiving a favourable report of its internal system of quality assurance and the San Jorge University, two. This certification is valid for 4 years.

1.2 Design and approval of programmes

The Spanish university system presents two types of programmes: official study programmes, recognized by the Spanish Government and so-called 'títulos propios', or own programmes which are offered under the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. In the case of official study programmes several external quality assurance processes for approval and monitoring of the programmes are compulsory. At the start of each new programme an ex-ante evaluation by ANECA is required (though ACPUA also collaborates in this phase following a decision of the Government of Aragón in that respect). For Master programmes in the field of Arts, ACPUA is fully responsible for ex-ante accreditation.

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Assessment of students is considered in several of the evaluation schemes performed by ACPUA. The panel appreciates that in the case of degree's accreditation a specific criterion relates to the assessment of students, namely the extent of which the learning and assessment methodologies are adjusted to the profile of the students accepted and the objectives of the study programme. Moreover, another criterion also takes into consideration the degree of students' academic progress and their satisfaction. In the case of AUDIT and DOCENTIA review procedures, the assessment of students is also taken into consideration in the review procedures. However, no explicit mention is made to whether programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process. The panel suggests to the Agency to 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

ACPUA analyses if higher education institutions apply pre-defined and published regulations covering several aspects of the student life cycle. For instance, in the case of re-accreditation of programmes, the progress of students is considered explicitly in the evaluation criterion. The issues of admission, recognition, and certification are covered in the protocols for re-accreditation and evaluation panels are also expected to pay attention to those issues.

1.5 Teaching staff

Quality assurance of teaching staff is an important part of the work of ACPUA, 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 re-accreditation procedure, quality assurance of teaching staff is taken into account explicitly as it is one of the criteria established in the evaluation protocols. Other evaluation activities are also relevant in this respect, such as the DOCENTIA scheme which supports universities in designing their own procedures for the evaluation of the teaching activity of their academic staff. Finally, it could be said that the evaluation of research is also relevant to ensure the quality of the teaching staff.

1.6 Learning resources and student support

ACPUA evaluates learning resources and student support in the programme reviews. One of the criteria is precisely the supporting staff and services and the learning resources available for students.

1.7 Information management

At the programme level, the accreditation procedures (including follow-up and re-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 DOCENTIA evaluation, the information about the quality of teaching is gathered and evaluated by the Agency, following the guidelines defined by ANECA.

1.8 Public information

Public information plays a crucial role in the external quality assurance processes of ACPUA, which pays particular attention to a wide publicity of those procedures and results. This is regarded as a central criterion in the follow-up procedure of ex-ante accreditation since higher education institutions have to publish both their own follow-up reports and the assessment of these reports by the Agency on their website in a way that is easily accessible, namely to current and prospective students.

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) and 6 years (for bachelor's degrees). In between, each programme is supposed to undergo a follow-up

procedure, which is done by ACPUA in the region of Aragon. The system of re-accreditation has been implemented by ACPUA, in collaboration with ANECA.

Furthermore, within the Spanish framework, the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards is a crucial element in the voluntary evaluation scheme AUDIT which is implemented by ANECA. The two Universities from Aragon have been involved in this programme. According to this procedure, there is a special focus in the consolidation of internal mechanisms of quality assurance and the capacity to attend effectively to the recommendations produced in the report of the ex-ante accreditation.

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 programmes and every 4 years for master programmes). This responsibility is taken by ACPUA.

Summary

The panel is confident that the broad range of external quality assurance activities in Spain takes into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes in the universities described in Part 1 of the ESGs. The panel's analysis of the protocols and practice of ACPUA indicates that most of the items considered are covered to a substantial degree.

The panel found out that the work of ACPUA has benefited from collaboration at the national and regional level, and that helped the Agency to consolidate itself. The different stakeholders, from institutional representatives to those from the ministry and employer bodies that the panel met during the visit, expressed their appreciation for ACPUA's contribution to the development of a quality culture in higher education in Aragon through its various procedures and for its resonance among the different stakeholders. All stakeholders also expressed their appreciation for the way in which ACPUA manages to create interlinkages between the broad range of quality assurance activities, in order to reduce the administrative burden of those activities and to increase acceptance within the higher education communities. An example is the way how the results of the AUDIT and DOCENTIA evaluations is taken into account within programme level evaluations.

Recommendations

The panel recommends that ACPUA continues to work with the university system to further develop the relationship between standard 2.1 and the development of effective internal quality assurance processes at institutional level. Among the possible areas for further attention, the panel would highlight the following ones:

- Further strengthen the coherence of different evaluation procedures;
- More schools and educational centres should be encouraged to strengthen their internal quality systems through external reviews such as the AUDIT;
- More attention should be given to a student centred learning and assessment practices.

Panel's 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.

Evidence

ACPUA designs and implements its quality assurance processes in the framework of both the national and regional legislation. Several of its reviews are performed in collaboration with other Agencies (notably with ANECA and other Spanish Agencies). Even when developed more autonomously, the terms of reference are developed at the national level, though in consultation with the network of regional quality assurance agencies. This applies particularly to programme evaluation and, in the near future, to institutional evaluation, with common quality assurance standards defined for the whole of Spain, regardless of the responsible agency, though each agency may afterwards develop and adapt them in accordance to regional needs. In these situations, the Spanish Network of Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU) is the body in charge of dictating these basic/common criteria and guidelines. Once written, and according to the legislation, REACU communicates them to the responsible Ministry (Education, Culture and Sport). The design of methodologies at the national level continues afterwards and the different stakeholders (such as educational authorities and universities) have another opportunity to discuss these methodologies in the University Commission for Follow-up and Accreditation (CURSA) and the University General Policy Conference (CGPU). Once there is an agreement for general common criteria and guidelines, ACPUA adapts and develops them according to the needs and strategic objectives of the Aragon university system.

As regards the development of new quality assurance process, ACPUA has tried to integrate the different stakeholders in the different phases of the process. Thus, the Board of Directors (where all stakeholder groups are represented), must approve the new activity and its governing principles. Following that, the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation defines the evaluation methodologies, which are subject to consultations with representatives of involved stakeholders (e.g., reviewed institutions, reviewers, educational authorities). After that, the Commission reviews and approves the evaluation protocols, aiming at making them objective and impartial. These protocols are published online, disseminated through different social media channels and presented in public meetings or seminars.

In order to further optimise the procedures, processes are initialized with a pilot whenever feasible, allowing for modifications and improvements. After finalizing an evaluation process, ACPUA carries out a meta-evaluation process in which all participants assess the implementation of the process and suggest enhancement measures for the future (this is usually done through surveys). Based on the findings, the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation writes recommendations to improve the evaluation methodologies and updates the protocols. The results of the meta-evaluation processes are reported by ACPUA's Director to the Board of Directors and are also published on the Agency's website.

According to the Agency the involvement and consultation of stakeholders has been important to attain an equilibrium between the complexity of evaluation processes and the higher education institutions' capability to respond/comply through their own internal quality assurance system.

Analysis

Although the Spanish system has a tradition of being highly regulated, including in quality assurance matters, the emergence of regional Agencies has created opportunities for some moderation and adaptation of procedures to local needs and specificities. In the case of ACPUA the modest size of the higher education system of Aragon has created an opportunity for the Agency to explore a closer interaction 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 types of stakeholders. Institutions are in general positive about the approaches, although they think that processes are sometimes rather lengthy.

Although ACPUA has a limited margin of manoeuvre in the design of quality assurance processes and one cannot say that most of its procedures are targeting specific needs, the Agency has made an effort to introduce some specificities and to legitimize as far as possible those procedures through consultation with relevant stakeholders. ACPUA has developed efforts to link the evaluation schemes and to reduce the administrative burden for itself and for the higher education institutions. There are also examples of extensive preparation, sometimes with pilots, in order to fine-tune the evaluation schemes, and regular meta-evaluation, involving different stakeholders, in order to further develop each evaluation scheme. The Agency is also recognized for giving particular attention to the topic of employability, which is perceived as very important by various stakeholders.

Thus, the Agency has operated fruitfully within the boundaries of the regional and national system in which it operates. The panel encourages it to pursue further that interaction as it may contribute to greater effectiveness and legitimacy of its quality assurance activities.

Recommendations

The panel encourages ACPUA to pursue its efforts to explore the possibilities of adapting procedures to the size and priorities of the regional higher education system. This will benefit as well from deepening the involvement of external stakeholders in designing and assessing existing and future quality assurance mechanisms.

Panel's 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

Evidence

ACPUA designs evaluation processes following a standard four-stage model: self-evaluation, external evaluation (including a site visit), evaluation report and follow-up to monitor progress). The evaluation body in charge of issuing the results is an evaluation committee formed by experts from outside Aragon. In the cases of evaluation of programmes and institutions the Agency has included a student member since 2015 (one of them, an international student).

Quality assurance processes include:

1. a self-evaluation by the reviewed entity;
2. an external evaluation, including often a site visit;
3. a report with recommendations and suggestions for improvement;
4. a follow-up procedure, when relevant.

The main exceptions to this standard structure are the training schools' accreditation and the regional program of the University of Zaragoza of teaching staff evaluation which have specific characteristics. In these cases, the external evaluation does not include a site visit. In the latter case the system was set up by the University of Zaragoza and the Aragon Higher Education Act requires ACPUA to assure that this evaluation system works appropriately and according to the criteria approved by the Government. According to the agreements with the Aragon Government, the teaching staff evaluation system is an annual evaluation. In the case of the training schools' accreditation, the supporting evidence for these accreditations is the SER, reports from the Aragon Education Department, and ACPUA's programmes reports (Follow up/Accreditation), which are also validated through desk-based analysis. ACPUA awards accredited schools a quality label for three years, renewable after a follow up.

The Agency appoints usually one of its Quality Assurance Technicians to serve as Technical Secretary of Review panels and Evaluation Committees (with voice but no right to vote), aiming to ensure a systematic and consistent application of the evaluation criteria and providing technical support. At the same time, the commission in charge of designing and updating the protocols receives feedback about the implementation of processes (such as evaluation results, meta-evaluation, etc.) and analyses it in order to foster continuous enhancement and reinforcement of decisions' reliability and consistency.

Analysis

The panel confirms that the review processes performed by ACPUA are 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 also confirms that the main review processes include the four steps required by the ESGs, namely: a self-assessment or equivalent, an external assessment normally including a site

visit, a report resulting from the external assessment, and a consistent follow-up. Some remarks may be made on the consistency of the level of detail of the public reports (see below).

As indicated before, all stakeholders value ACPUA's efforts to not make the system too heavy, although it implements all necessary evaluation activities. E.g. there is only one follow-up evaluation at programme level between two accreditation rounds, and evaluations are based as much as possible on existing documents.

Thus the panel considers that ACPUA is fully compliant in this respect.

Recommendations

The panel considers that ACPUA should reflect on the possibility of involving stakeholders other than those from universities in oversight committees for evaluation processes.

Panel's 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).

Evidence

ACPUA pays significant attention to the selection and training of its reviewers. Every Evaluation Committee is responsible for implementing the corresponding evaluation processes. Given the small size of the higher education system, for several years the Agency has established that all reviewers need to be from outside Aragon and cannot be employed by any higher education institution located in the Region. For the selection of its reviewers, ACPUA has benefited from the close collaboration with ANECA and with other regional agencies.

The profiles and characteristics that review panel members need to meet are defined in advance for every evaluation process. ACPUA tries to combine different relevant disciplinary or institutional experiences in each panel composition. Panels carry out an initial assessment (including the evidences and information gathered in a site visit, if foreseen in the protocol) and are made usually by three members (a Chair, an academic, and a student), who need to be experts in the knowledge area subject to review.

ACPUA has paid particular attention to the participation of students. In 2014, students were incorporated in every review panel and in the Programmes and Institutions evaluation committees (in the latter case, an international student), as well as to the Board of Directors and to the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation. As with the other reviewers, student reviewers are always from an external university system. The training of these student reviewers has been done often in collaboration with other Spanish Agencies through jointly organized workshops.

ACPUA has given significant attention to the training of reviewers. It requires that all of them take and pass training related to the evaluation process before they begin their work. ACPUA also provides a

diverse set of training and support tools and materials to reviewers such as workshop materials, online tutorials, and guides with recommendations to produce reports and for site visits. The Agency performs a meta-evaluation at the end of each evaluation process, notably by collecting feedback about the quality of the training and the support provided by ACPUA and its staff. This includes an assessment of the performance of reviewers.

Analysis

The Agency has defined provisions aiming to ensure that reviews are carried out in a reliable and consistent manner, and that protocols are applied correctly and with the needed impartiality. All evaluations are implemented by groups of external experts, and the Agency has changed its policy to include a student in all panels, especially in program and institutional reviews, in which students are equal partners as the other panel members. Exceptions to this approach are research evaluations and evaluation of junior teaching staff performance. In order to guarantee consistency, their report is finalised by a Technical Committee, which is as well composed by external experts, including a student.

Given the size of the system, it is appropriate to be restrictive regarding any links of the reviewers to the higher education institutions located in the region, though greater efforts should be made to involve experts from outside Spain. The Agency confirmed its willingness to include in the near future experts from outside Spain, as this could be a tool to broaden its benchmarks and enrich its work in quality assurance.

The Agency signals that it is sometimes difficult to get reviewers with broad knowledge and experience in the specific field to be reviewed, although the cooperation with other Spanish agencies in order to select the right experts is helpful. The system, in which experts have to apply to become member of the database in order to become eligible for evaluations, remains, however, an important threshold, especially for international experts. ACPUA should consider, in coordination with other Spanish agencies, whether another approach would be feasible for the selection of international experts.

The Agency has placed a significant effort in the involvement of students in review processes and the panel has found evidence of its consequences in the actual operation of review processes. To the knowledge of the panel, ACPUA is one of the best examples in this respect in Spain and it should be commended for that. Nevertheless, representatives of employers and society at-large are absent in the large majority of the panels and the Agency should reflect about this in future evaluation processes. The protocols include the possibility to include these experts. So, it is rather an issue of paying attention to this and finding the right experts with broad expertise and feeling with higher education processes.

The Agency also has an interesting and versatile approach towards the training of experts. According to the views expressed in the site visit, the work of the Agency and its staff is well received by the vast majority of panel members. Also the feedback obtained from reviewers was that the materials and supported provided were useful and adequate. The cooperation with other agencies in this respect is also positive and should be pursued further in the future.

Commendations

The panel commends the Agency for the involvement of students as partners in the agency's work in ACPUA's committees and on review panels. This involvement extends to the work carried out by the

Agency's staff to interact with students in the higher education institutions. The panel is particularly impressed by the fact that the external member of the Institutional Evaluation Committee is an international student and encourages the Agency to replicate this on other committees. The panel found this to be particularly significant in the Spanish national context and underlines the willingness of all students it met to participate actively in the meetings.

Recommendations

The panel recommends that ACPUA should consider involving representatives from employers and broader society in expert panels. The panel considers that this would assist the Agency in developing thematic reviews and in meeting society's demands and expectations for information.

The panel furthermore recommends to review the selection mechanism of international experts, in order to facilitate the participation of international experts in review panels.

Panel's 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

ACPUA's activities are carried out according to evaluation protocols produced and approved beforehand by a specific commission dedicated exclusively to this task – the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation. An important part of these protocols is the description of the evaluation criteria. The evaluation protocols include explanations on how to interpret the standards, placing particular attention to the evidences that must be presented. All protocols are published online and then disseminated through social media, making sure the entities subject to review have all needed and updated information before the start of the review process. These aspects were strengthened by the recent reform of the Aragon Higher Education Act, whose revised version enhanced the need of evaluation procedures and criteria, as well as the composition of the corresponding commissions, to be established and widely disseminated prior to the beginning of each evaluation process.

Furthermore, ACPUA has tried to promote a sound and consistent application of the evaluation criteria. Accordingly, most of its evaluation processes follow a two-phase model. Firstly, a review panel carries out the initial assessment and produces a report by consensus. Secondly, the Evaluation Committees, which are formed by experts from all fields of knowledge and with expertise in quality assurance, issue the evaluation reports following pre-defined and publicized evaluation protocols. These evaluation reports are produced by consensus, and should provide a clear rationale on its conclusions. In case of discrepancies, the President is responsible for finding a way to overcome those differences. These evaluation committees have an overview of the whole evaluation process, which aims at ensuring that evaluation criteria and standards are applied consistently and based on

evidence. Once the draft reports have been issued by the committee, the reviewed entity has 20 working days to issue clarifications or appeals, which will be reviewed by the former before the final reports is set.

Analysis

During the site visit the review panel was able to confirm that the criteria and protocols are public and easily accessible to stakeholders. There is also extensive consultation and dissemination before an evaluation scheme starts. The views expressed in the meetings indicate a positive valuation of the consistency and fairness of the different review processes. The criteria are also detailed and regarded as implemented consistently. Moreover, the two-phase decision making structure seems to be an effective way to ensure consistency in the review procedure. The establishment of the three Evaluation Committees has been a very important step in this respect and the panel has been told by several interviewees that its implementation has effectively contributed in this regard. The panel did not gain full insight in the level of interference the Committees have in the process of homogenizing reports. However, it became clear that no feedback on the changes which are made is provided to the review panels who performed the evaluation. Although the panel is convinced that the Committees make efforts to not alter the content of the reports in the process of homogenizing them, it would be good to provide the adapted reports to those experts who have been in charge of the evaluation. This addition could assure that no substantiation is lost or altered in the process of homogenization.

The practice of developing meta-analyses has also contributed to improve the activities of the Agency in this respect. Nevertheless, the panel observed that some reports stay quite general and do not refer to the sub-criteria which are mentioned in the protocols. The Agency should pay some attention to this in order to attain greater depth and consistency.

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.

Evidence

Evaluation reports are notified to the reviewees, or, when needed, submitted to the authorities in charge of taking the decision or subject to be informed by law (regardless if it is a mandatory or voluntary evaluation process). All experts participate in producing the evaluation reports through a decision making process by consensus. Evaluation templates are subject to revision as part of the meta-evaluation process and are updated whenever there is a possibility to improve its clarity or usefulness for the different audiences. All reports are published on the website, which has been provided with a "Reports search engine" and the translation of the main documents into English.

The same concern with wide dissemination is applied for the global reports. These summarize the results at the end of an evaluation process (follow up, accreditation, research activity, etc.), are

presented to the Board of Directors and published in the Agency's website. Moreover, all comprehensive reports are published online on ACPUA's website, as well as disseminated through social media channels to the university system and the society as a whole. The same procedure is applied to meta-evaluation reports and with the Director's resolutions[3]. Whenever reports contain a formal statement (favourable or not), the decision is presented in the initial part of the report. ACPUA regularly publishes and disseminates to the university system and the society as a whole summary reports on global results at the end of programme accreditation processes. The publication of summary reports of best practices identified during the programme accreditation process is also relevant in this respect.

ACPUA`s reports usually feature not only the final assessment, but also aim at providing an evidence-based rationale and recommendations for improvements. The Agency is perceived as being concerned that the structure of reports is well organized and user-friendly and has worked in recent years to strengthen those aspects. Thus, it has defined guidelines and protocols that include in all reports an introduction, a process description and legal frame, a formal decision, main conclusions and recommendations for improvement, and compliance analysis for each evaluation criteria, with evidence-based reasons and explanations that are expected to be presented in a useful, clear and constructive manner. ACPUA's programme accreditation reports (which constitutes the main quality assurance process in Spain) have evolved from the initial basic national model, increasing gradually its utility and clarity.

Analysis

The Review panel found that ACPUA has made a significant effort to develop more 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, though there was some variability regarding their detail and usefulness. The changes regarding the review Committees may also contribute to strengthen the reports and their consistency, adequacy and usefulness.

Although the quality of the reports is satisfactory overall, visible differences in the level of detail and the substantiation of overall evaluation exist. The rationale behind the overall score is sometimes clearly outlined, while in other reports the level of detail is limited and mainly formal phrases describe the outcome of the evaluation, without making the rationale behind the outcome explicit. E.g., the report of a master's programme in the Arts is quite short and little detailed. The panel understood that this report was the result of a long process, which in the end led to a report without recommendations, nor substantiation. Although a formal outcome document will be published by an entity outside ACPUA, the reporting on this evaluation process does not fully comply with the expectations of public reports as the panel understands this concept. In the reports on the 'centros adscritos' the conclusion is not always very clear.

Summarizing best practices and recommendations for improvement is good practice. Although there is not an explicit policy to limit the number of best practices identified, the standard practice seems to be limited to a few number. Though the panel understands the need for reviewers to be selective,

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[3] These refer to ACPUA's final evaluations decisions, which are subject to appeal to the Appeal committee (according to the Statutes of ACPUA).

it does not see a need to limit the number of best practices to a few good practices. If a unit of evaluation performs well, a broader range of good practices might be highlighted.

Dissemination efforts are also well appreciated by stakeholders.

Recommendations

The panel considers that ACPUA should remain vigilant to the need for consistency in the production of reports, especially in view of the expected growth in the number of type of activities.

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 revised ESG place a more visible emphasis on safeguarding the rights of reviewed institutions. This was reflected in the legal reform of the Aragon Higher Education Act. Since then, the Agency has attempted to publish procedures for handling appeals against specific decisions and handling complaints from higher education providers or any individual. In 2015, ACPUA's Board of Directors approved the Complaints and Appeals Procedure, publicly available and clearly pointed out in the website.

As ACPUA is a public Agency and thus ruled by Public Law (national and regional), its activity is subject to the Administrative Law, which is especially careful in safeguarding the rights of reviewees against public administrations through the appeals mechanism. Through an appeal, reviewees can question or refuse the formal outcomes of a quality assurance process, namely by proving an outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been properly applied or that the processes have not been consistently implemented. Due to ACPUA's legal nature, its final decisions take the form of a Director's Resolution, which always include information about the specific appeal mechanism and timeframe. Moreover, many relevant technical decisions are also a Directors' Resolution and thus subject to appealing. Likewise, whenever ACPUA forwards a review report to a higher body, the final decision is also subject to appeals in the form and deadlines stated.

Complaints or appeals can be filed by anyone dissatisfied with the Agency's service, which takes care of complaints and claims as part of its internal quality assurance system. Given that ACPUA's activity is a public service, the internal procedure to handle these is based on a regional law (Royal Decree 91/2001). Additionally, in order to reinforce the rights of reviewed institutions in accordance to the ESG's requirements, ACPUA's Board of Directors approved on May 4th 2015 the creation of a new body - the Appeals Committee. This technical body is responsible for supervising the correct implementation of all evaluation, certification and accreditation procedures.

ACPUA has included another tool to reinforce the protection of those under review in all its protocols for quality assurance of programmes and institutions. This is the possibility of challenging reviewers

(stating specific reasons) before an evaluation process starts. For instance, in the case of programme reviews, higher education institutions have 10 days to challenge the proposed reviewers on qualified grounds.

Analysis

ACPUA is significantly regulated by provisions aiming at checking the legality and adequacy of its activities and decisions due to its nature as a public body. Moreover, the Agency has recently established an Appeals Committee. The review panel has met the members of the Committee during the site visit and was informed about the mechanisms being implemented and the criteria according to which this Committee will aim at fulfilling its role. The panel found it positive that everyone who is involved in a procedure can complain and file an appeal.

However, given its recent establishment there was little evidence about the effectiveness of those provisions, as the Committee had not yet received any complaint thus far. Hence, though the Agency seems to have in place the appropriate mechanisms, only time will confirm its adequacy and effectiveness and this is an area to which a subsequent review panel should pay attention.

The panel was surprised to find out that a stakeholder could choose to use the internal appeals procedure or go directly to court. It suggests that ACPUA consider whether it is possible and desirable to require the use of the internal appeal procedure before external judicial procedures can be started, as the latter can be more burdensome, lengthier, and conducive to greater acrimony between the different stakeholders.

Recommendations

The panel recommends that ACPUA pays attention to the actual implementation of the mechanism of appeals and its adequacy and effectiveness, namely regarding the time for processes to be analysed, and the formal and substantive fairness achieved.

The panel encourages ACPUA to promote as far as possible the use of the internal appeal procedures before external judicial procedures can be started, for the sake of speed and greater collaboration with higher education institutions.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

3.1.

The panel would like to commend the Agency for its new organisational structure which has introduced more clarity and transparency into the structure of the agency.

3.3.

The Panel would like to commend the Agency for including external experts outside Aragon and outside Spain in its structure, an important step that has contributed to making decision-making processes more transparent and to strengthening the Agency's independence.

3.4.

The panel would like to commend the Agency for the organisation and facilitation of seminars and other dissemination activities which are clearly appreciated by stakeholders.

3.6.

The panel would like to commend the Agency for the open and willing attitude of the staff to work with the university system and other stakeholders in Aragon as agents of change and development, particularly in terms of quality culture.

2.4.

The panel commends the Agency for the involvement of students as partners in the agency's work in ACPUA's committees and on review panels. This involvement extends to the work carried out by the Agency's staff to interact with students in the higher education institutions. The panel is particularly impressed by the fact that the external member of the Institutional Evaluation Committee is an international student and encourages the Agency to replicate this on other committees. The panel found this to be particularly significant in the Spanish national context and underlines the willingness of all students it met to participate actively in the meetings.

OVERALL FINDINGS 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, ACPUA is in compliance with the ESG. The panel therefore recommends to the Board of ENQA that ACPUA should have its membership in ENQA granted for a period of five years.

The ESGs where full compliance have been achieved are:

- Part 3 – 3.2., 3.3, and 3.7.
- Part 2 - 2.3 and 2.5.

The ESGs where substantive compliance have been achieved are:

- Part 3 – 3.1., 3.4, 3.5, 3.6.
- Part 2 - 2.1., 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, and 2.7.

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.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

All recommendations and all the report was written aiming at helping the Agency to consolidate the significant progress it has made in recent years and to help in devising its strategy for future development.

3.1.

The panel recommends to further increase the stakeholder participation in its work, mainly through involving representatives of the labour market and society in evaluation panels and committees, wherever deemed relevant.

3.4.

The panel encourages the Agency to sustain its efforts for different thematic analysis and to allocate resources to these activities as these may contribute to enhance the relevance and legitimacy of its role in promoting awareness and informed policies about quality assurance.

3.5.

The panel recommends that ACPUA reflects about the necessary resources in the light of longer term achievement of strategic goals and the expansion of activities. Hence, the panel recommends that the agency tries to anticipate the impact of those activities on staff, not only in terms of staffing levels but also with regard to the need for staff development and training in order to manage transition effectively.

Also in relation to resources, the panel recommends that ACPUA considers the impact of the achievement of strategic goals on current activities and processes to ensure that it can adapt to work with possibly a larger number of stakeholders and also to the requirements of systems outside Aragon and Spain.

3.6.

The panel recommends that ACPUA strengthens its collaboration with other Agencies to consolidate its achievements and to foster a continuous awareness about possible limitations, areas of improvements, and necessary changes.

2.1.

The panel recommends that ACPUA continues to work with the university system to further develop the relationship between standard 2.1 and the development of effective internal quality assurance processes at institutional level. Among the possible areas for further attention, the panel would highlight the following ones:

- Strengthen the coherence of different evaluation procedures;
- More schools and educational centres should be encouraged to strengthen their internal quality systems through external reviews such as the AUDIT;
- More attention should be given to a student centred learning and assessment practices;

2.2.

The panel encourages ACPUA to pursue its efforts to explore the possibilities of adapting procedures to the size and priorities of the regional higher education system. This will benefit as well from deepening the involvement of external stakeholders in designing and assessing existing and future quality assurance mechanisms.

2.3.

The panel considers that ACPUA should reflect on the possibility of involving stakeholders other than those from universities in oversight committees for evaluation processes.

2.4.

The panel recommends that ACPUA should consider involving representatives from employers and broader society in expert panels. The panel considers that this would assist the Agency in developing thematic reviews and in meeting society's demands and expectations for information.

The panel furthermore recommends to review the selection mechanism of international experts, in order to facilitate the participation of international experts in review panels.

2.6

The panel considers that ACPUA should remain vigilant to the need for consistency in the production of reports, especially in view of the expected growth in the number of type of activities.

2.7

The panel recommends that ACPUA pays attention to the actual implementation of the mechanism of appeals and its adequacy and effectiveness, namely regarding the time for processes to be analysed, and the formal and substantive fairness attained.

The panel encourages ACPUA to promote as far as possible the use of the internal appeal procedures before external judicial procedures can be started, for the sake of speed and greater collaboration with higher education institutions.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 - PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Start	End	Wednesday, February 17th 2016	PARTICIPANTS	POSITION	REMARKS	ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
18:00	19:00	Meeting with the Management of the Agency	Antonio SERRANO	Director of ACPUA			FIONA CROZIER
Start	**End**	**Thursday, February 18th 2016**	**PARTICIPANTS**	**POSITION**	**REMARKS**	**ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION**	**LEAD PANEL MEMBER**
09:00	09:35	Meeting with Aragon Government	Pilar ALEGRÍA	Aragon Minister for Innovation, Research and Higher Education	President of the ACPUA Consejo Rector		FIONA CROZIER
			Fernando BELTRÁN	Aragon Vice-Minister for Innovation, Research and Higher Education			
10:00	10:50	Meeting with Board of Directors (Consejo Rector)	José Antonio BELTRÁN	Vice-President of Consejo Rector	Aragon General Director for Higher Education		FIONA CROZIER
			Manuel LÓPEZ	Member of Consejo Rector	Rector of the University of Zaragoza (UZ)		
			Javier MONGE	Member of Consejo Rector	Student's representative USJ		
			Carlos PÉREZ	Member of Consejo Rector	Rector of the San Jorge University (USJ)		
			Javier ROYO	Member of Consejo Rector	President of the Student's Council UZ		
10:50	*11:05*	*Break*	*Review panel only*				
11:05	11:35	Meeting with advisory boards	Jaume FARRÉS	Member of Committee of Experts	Professor for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology - U. Autónoma Barcelona		FIONA CROZIER
			Elena TEJEDOR	Member of "Towards ENQA" Steering Group	Former Director of QA Agency ACSUCYL		
11:35	*11:50*	*Break*	*Review panel only*				

11:50	**12:35**	**Designing methodologies: meeting with Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation (CECA)**	Francisco ARCEGA	Member of CECA	Professor for Electrical Engineering - UZ		FIONA CROZIER
			Pilar FIGUERA	Member of CECA	Professor for Educational Psychology - U. Barcelona		
			Cristina PASTOR	Student member of CECA	Master Student (U. Miguel Hernández). Member of ESU		
			Pilar ROCA	Member of CECA	Former Director of QA Agency AQUIB		
12:35	*12:50*	*Break and walk to ACPUA office*					
12:50	**13:35**	**Meeting with ACPUA staff**	Irene MELCHOR	QA and Internationalization Technician			FIONA CROZIER
			Carlos OLIVÁN	Former QA and Strategic Foresight Technician	Part of ACPUA since its creation (2006) until 2015		
			Isabel ORTEGA	QA Technician			
13:35	*15:00*	*Catering Lunch*	*Review panel only*				
15:00	**16:00**	**Meeting with Study Programmes Evaluation Committee (SET)**	Pilar GÓMEZ	Member of SET	Professor for Pharmacology - U. Complutense Madrid		FIONA CROZIER
			Marta GÓNZALEZ DE CALDAS	Member of SET	Veterinary student - U. Córdoba		
			Ángela MORALES	Member of SET	Professor for Music Expression Didactics - U. Autónoma de Madrid		
			Victoria NOGUÉS	President of SET	Professor for Biotechnology - U. Autónoma Barcelona		
			Jordi SURIÑACH	Member of SET	Professor for Applied Economy - U. Barcelona		
			Mikel URQUIJO	Member of SET	Professor for Contemporary History - U. País Vasco		
16:00	*16:15*	*Break*	*Review panel only*				
16:15	**17:15**	**Meeting with institutions**	Celia CAÑADAS	Head of QA UZ			FIONA CROZIER
			Amaya GIL	Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs USJ	Member of Consejo Rector		
			Eva PARDOS	Vice- Rector for Academic Affairs UZ	Member of Consejo Rector		
			Luisa PELLEGERO	Director of Aragon School of Design (ESDA)			

			Andy TUNNICLIFFE	Director of Internationalization and QA USJ			
17:15	*17:30*	*Break*	*Review panel only*				
17:30	**18:00**	**Complaints, Appeals & Evaluation Ethics: Meeting with Appeals Committee**	Juan José CUBERO	Member of ACPUA Study Group on Ethics	Former member of CECA. Corporate social responsibility expert		FIONA CROZIER
			Elena LARRAURI	Member of Comité de Garantías	Professor for Criminal Law & Criminology - U. Pompeu Fabra		
			Gabriel MORALES	President of Comité de Garantías	Lawyer of State - Abogacía del Estado (Zaragoza)		
18:00	*19:00*	*Internal meeting to summarize outcomes*	*Review panel only*				

Start	End	Friday, February 19th 2016	PARTICIPANTS	POSITION	REMARKS	ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
08:30	09:15	**Meeting with other evaluation bodies: Research Evaluation Committee (SEI) & Institutions Evaluation Committee (SEC)**	José BONET	Member (SEI)	Professor for Applied Mathematics - U. Politécnica de Valencia		FIONA CROZIER
			Alexandra RAIJMAKERS	Student Member (SEC)	Master student in Higher Education (U. of Oslo). Member of ESU		
			Celso RODRÍGUEZ	President (SEC)	Professor for Algebra - U. de Santiago de Compostela		
			Gracia SERRANO	Member (SEC)	Quality and Accreditations Director of ESIC (Madrid)		
09:15	*09:30*	*Break*	*Review panel only*				
09:30	10:15	**Meeting with peer review panel members**	Íñigo AGUAS	Reviewer: Programmes Accreditation	Computer Engineering Student - U. Pública de Navarra		FIONA CROZIER
			Mª Pilar CHARRO	Reviewer: Programmes Accreditation	Professor for Labour Law - U. Rey Juan Carlos		
			Isabel HERNÁNDEZ	Reviewer: Programmes Accreditation	Professor for German Philology - U. Complutense Madrid		
			Víctor PETUYA	Reviewer: Programmes Accreditation	Professor for Mechanical Engineering - U. País Vasco		
			José Manuel VALLE	Reviewer and panel Secretary: Programmes Accreditation	Professor for Geography - U. País Vasco		
10:15	*10:30*	*Break*	*Review panel only*				
10:30	11:30	**Meeting with stakeholder representatives**	Octavio ANSÓN	Student at Escuela de Ingeniería y Arquitectura UZ	Student involved in ACPUA's Strategic Plan design, ACPUA + Estudiantes Program and ACPUA seminars		FIONA CROZIER
			Elena AUSEJO	Trade Union CCOO Representative at UZ	Member of Consejo Rector. Professor for History of the Science - UZ		
			Antonio ELIPE	Director of the University Centre for Defence Studies (CUD)	Granted by the Minister of Defence and located in the General Military Academy, CUD is a UZ partner		
			Andrés GARCÍA	President of "El Salvador" Primary / High School	Expert in Primary & Secondary Education. Project: Transition to Higher Education		
			Fernando LAHOZ	Director of the Instituto de Síntesis Química y Catálisis Homogénea	ISQCH is a University research institute from the UZ		

				ISQCH (Chemical Research)			
			Inmaculada PLAZA	Director of the UZ Escuela Politécnica Superior in Teruel	Teruel is a subsidiary Campus from the UZ (180 km away from Zaragoza)		
			Carmelo PÉREZ	General Vice-secretary of the Business Association CEPYME	Member of Consejo Rector		
			Manuel SERRANO	President of the Consejo Social UZ	The UZ Consejo Social is a participative body connecting university & society. Member of Consejo Rector		
11:30	*12:30*	*Internal panel discussion*	*Review panel only*				
12:30	**13:00**	**Meeting with the Management of the Agency**					
13:00	*16:00*	*Lunch with internal discussion*	*Review panel only*				
16:00	**16:30**	**Presentation of the conclusions to the Director and staff**					

External review of the Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

1. Background and Context

Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA) is the official agency for the evaluation of higher education in the region of Aragon (Spain). It was set up in 2005 by Law of the regional Parliament. Its legal status is that of an autonomous body (public law entity), with own legal personality and its own assets and capacity to attain its objects. It performs its functions objectively, impartially and independently, recognized and guaranteed by law. It is governed by its own bylaws, approved in 2006 (Decree 239/2006, of 4 December).

The mission of ACPUA is to assure and promote the quality of the university system of Aragon. Part of this aim is the development of useful links between the university, the social-productive areas, the institutional decision-making bodies and the society of Aragon as a whole, as well as the promotion of the exchange of experience, not only with other national and international university systems but also with other educational levels (secondary education, vocational training, etc.).

In order to achieve this mission, ACPUA mainly develops technical quality assurance activities, such as evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation tasks. This public service is complemented with prospective and research tasks, as well as to promoting activities to strengthen a culture in higher education within the region.

ACPUA values:

- Independence, autonomy and objectivity.
- Social responsibility and transparency assuring public access to reliable, timely, clear and precise information.
- The establishment of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms for the continuous improvement of the processes in order to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency.
- The development of relations with all the groups of interest (university, administration, business world, society of Aragón) by promoting dialogue to ensure their satisfaction.
- The promotion of the students' participation in the Agency's activity and in the quality assurance processes.
- The cooperation with agencies and national and international higher education networks.
- The commitment to a high-quality work on behalf of the Agency's staff and its collaborators, associated to professionalism and honesty.
- Teamwork based on respect and cooperation to achieve the best work environment.

At the end of 2014, the Aragon Parliament approved an important legal modification to the Aragon Higher Education Act. This reform was aimed at consolidating the student participation in ACPUA's structure as well as to reinforce the Agency´s accountability and transparency mechanisms in accordance with the latest update of the European Standards and Guidelines, and had been proposed to the Aragon Government by the Agency´s Governing Body.

ACPUA has been an affiliate of ENQA since September 2013 and is applying for ENQA membership.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

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

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

2.1 Activities of ACPUA within the scope of the ESG

In order for ACPUA to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyze all activities that ACPUA considers to be within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programs 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 EQA of ACPUA have to be addressed in the external review:

Program accreditations:

- Study programme initial accreditation*
- Study programme accreditation
- Study programme follow up

Institutional evaluations:

- University research institutes initial accreditation
- University research institutes accreditation
- Training schools' certification
- Higher education institutions initial accreditation*
- DOCENTIA Programme: Teaching activity evaluation system audit
- Teaching staff evaluation system audit
- Partner HEI evaluation

Consultancy: support to decision making process

Important notes:

- The activities marked with an asterisk have not yet been implemented (or only in the field of arts for study programmes initial accreditation). These activities should be addressed as far as they can, based on their stage of development at the time of ACPUA's review.
- The organization of seminars and the publication of strategic foresight studies and reports may be relevant to ACPUA's compliance with certain standards. To that extent, these activities should be addressed in ACPUA's self-evaluation and the external review of ACPUA.

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*.

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-evaluation by ACPUA including the preparation of a self-evaluation report;
- A site visit by the review panel to ACPUA;
- 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. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

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 ACPUA 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 the ACPUA review.

3.2 Self-evaluation by ACPUA, including the preparation of a self-evaluation report

ACPUA is responsible for the execution and organization of its own self-evaluation process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-evaluation is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-evaluation 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 ACPUA fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-evaluation 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-evaluation 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 ENQA Guidelines for External Review of Quality Assurance Agencies, 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-evaluation 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

ACPUA 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 ACPUA at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by ACPUA in arriving in Zaragoza, Spain.

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

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 ACPUA within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If ACPUA 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 ACPUA, finalise the document and submit it to ACPUA and ENQA.

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

ACPUA is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which ACPUA 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

ACPUA 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. ACPUA 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 ACPUA. 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 ACPUA has met the ESG and can be thus admitted as a member of ENQA. The report may also be used for other purposes, such as 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 ACPUA and ENQA and until the decision by the Board is made, the report may not be used or relied upon by ACPUA, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. ACPUA 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.

Should the review report be used for applying to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), 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

ACPUA 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 (including follow-up visit)	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ACPUA	Aragon's Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education
ANECA	Spanish National Agency for Quality Assurance
CECA	Commission of Evaluation, Certification and 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
IQAS	Internal Quality Assurance System
QA	Quality assurance
REACU	Spanish Network of Agencies of Higher Education's Quality Assurance
SAR	Self-assessment report
SEC	Institutions Evaluation Committee
SEI	Research Evaluation Committee
SET	Study Programmes Evaluation Committee
USJ	University of San Jorge
UZ	University of Zaragoza

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ACPUA

- Self-Evaluation Report (ENG)
- Description of QA activities (ENG)
- Example: Accreditation report template (ENG)
- Example: Review panel site visit agenda (ENG)
- Engaging students: ACPUA + Estudiantes Programme (ENG)
- Visual summary ACPUA's 2014 Activity Report (ESP)

OTHER REFERENCE SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

- Annual Plan of Activities of Years 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 (ESP)
- Annual Report of Activities of Years 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 (ESP)
- Strategic Plan of ACPUA – 2015-2018 (ESP)
- ACPUA - Document Framework for Renewal of Accreditation (ESP)
- Program ACPUA for Renewal of Accreditation – Self-Evaluation Guide (ESP)
- ACPUA - Protocol for Follow-up CURSA (ESP)
- ACPUA - New guidelines for Follow-up of Official Bachelor and Master Degrees (ESP)
- ACPUA - Protocol for the Accreditation of Master in Artistic Fields (ESP)
- ACPUA Report on Employability and Employment: university education and the labour market in Aragon (2014) (ESP)
- Annual Report about the state of external quality evaluation in Spanish Universities (2014, 2013, and 2012) (ESP)
- Report on the Pilot Project of evaluation of learning outcomes (ESP)
- ACPUA and the management of change – from recommendations to good practice (ESP)
- Law 5/2005 that regulates the University system of Aragon
- Decree-law 239/2006 of the government of aragon that approves the statutes of ACPUA

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA) undertaken in 2015-2016.

2016 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW