



ENQA FOLLOW – UP REPORT 2018

ACPUA – Agencia de Calidad y Prospectiva Universitaria de Aragón

Avda. de Ranillas, nº 5D, 1ª Planta.
50018 Zaragoza
Spain

976 713386

acpua@aragon.es
<https://acpua.aragon.es/es>

ACPUA IS GROWING

“As the official quality assurance agency of Aragon, ACPUA is the main actor in external quality assurance in the region. It undertakes a broad range of quality assurance activities, touching all levels and activities of 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 experienced with ACPUA” (ENQA Review Report, p. 15). After registration in EQAR in December 2016 this role as the main actor is intensifying even further. ACPUA is receiving a growing and broad support at the regional level, not only political but also social (We can say that since January 2017 the activity has increased steadily.

Why this growth? Mainly for three reasons:

- The first one, because it has assumed the competences of evaluation that under the Spanish legal frame only are granted to the agencies registered in EQAR. In this way, and after a necessary process of technical transition, in July 2017 ANECA transferred to ACPUA all the evaluation activities corresponding to the study programme initial accreditation (*verificación de planes de estudio*) in the region of Aragon.
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- The second one, because in Spain the system of institutional accreditation has been finally implemented, being ACPUA responsible for all the activities of evaluation tied to this process in Aragon. In the last year, the Agency had to reorganize its committees and to elaborate new protocols. In addition, as we know, this new model of evaluation implies a qualitative change in the quality assurance culture, meaning time and great effort for the Agency promoting a model based on the generation of a *new kind of trust* and confidence in the HEIs that operate in Aragon.
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- The third one, because, being ACPUA a very small and regional agency, but registered in EQAR and trustworthy and “spiritually” very adept to the values and innovations that inspire the new ESG of 2015, maybe this has turned into an attractive model for certain institutions and stakeholders. We also took the advice of the ENQA panel seriously: “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 in the case in Aragon” (p. 21). Perhaps for all this, the fact is that since 2017 we live through new phenomena: on the one hand, the regional Government of Aragon is allocating additional responsibilities to the Agency (especially regarding research). On the other hand, Aragon universities but also some agencies and institutions from outside Aragon are addressing to the ACPUA to request additional services.

The ENQA panel was really discerning foreseeing (in several passages of the Report) this growth in the activity of the ACPUA and anticipating also the risks. As we have told the

Progress Visit panel, the review report was very useful for us. We particularly appreciated its realistic tone, which helped us to envisage the growth of activities and its consequences for sustainability, as well as the need to strengthen the ACPUA resources.

By these reason, we were aware that the recommendations made marked the way to improvement. Consequently, we have worked hard to take it in account. We have worked with special zeal in solving the two main recommendations: involving stakeholders (in a systematic way) and increasing in the financial and human resources.

The chair (Fiona Crozier, QAA) and secretary (Pedro Teixeira, University of Porto) of the ENQA review panel revisited ACPUA in March. This Progress Visit was very helpful. It gave us the opportunity to explain the usefulness of the report review. We tried to show our progress. But above all we were able to reflect together with stakeholders on the challenges of the future. The need of a new interaction with universities, helping to develop a robust, attentive quality culture, was on the main conclusions of the discussion. In this sense, we consider the Progress Visit as the first milestone towards the new ACPUA Strategic Plan. ACPUA is growing, but growth cannot be only quantitative.

INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS REPRESENTING LABOR MARKET AND SOCIETY

The ENQA panel expressed in 2016 the following: “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” (p. 15).

This is a main observation of the committee that has launched an important process of reflection within the agency in the last two years. Especially because the observation is reflected in several of the recommendations made in the review report:

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.

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.

In light of these recommendations, ACPUA has designed in 2017 and begun to execute in 2018 an action plan –called **Programa ACPUA + Society**- that allows a systemic response to this weakness:

The **ACPUA + Society Programme** arose from the need to comply with the recommendations made by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) to the Agency in its evaluation process in 2016. During ENQA's last Progress Visit, we had the opportunity to review the Agency's compliance with the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)" and we understood that it was necessary to strengthen the participation of our stakeholders in ACPUA's processes, committees and activities. As a result of this meta-evaluation we are working on an ambitious and global programme that involves the society of Aragon in the framework of ACPUA.

More information: <http://acpua.aragon.es/es/acpua-society>

The structure and methodology of the program are similar to those of the program ACPUA + students that we launched in 2014. ACPUA + students has allowed quite successfully the involvement of students in the agency's work and was highly valued in 2016 by the ENQA panel: "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" (p. 34). (Commendation 2.4). With this new and complementary program **ACPUA + Society** we hope to achieve similar results.

ACTIONS TO CARRY OUT:

A) INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS IN EVALUATION PANELS AND COMMITTEES:

- Study programme initial accreditation: **IMPLEMENTED 2017**
- Study programme accreditation: **IMPLEMENTED 2018**

- Study programme follow up: **IMPLEMENTED 2018**
- Higher Education institutional evaluation : **IMPLEMENTED 2018**
- Postgraduate programme accreditation: **TO BE IMPLEMENTED 2019**
- University Research Institutes accreditation: **TO BE IMPLEMENTED**
- DOCENTIA programme: Teaching activity evaluation system audit **IMPLEMENTED 2019**
- Teaching staff evaluation system audit: **TO BE IMPLEMENTED**
- Partner HEI evaluation: **TO BE IMPLEMENTED**

FACTS:

- Professionals who operate in the labor market has been incorporated to the Commissions (*Comisiones de Evaluación de Rama, CERs*) and *Subcomisión de Evaluación de Titulaciones (SET)* reporting in the study program accreditation procedures.
- One professional/representative of labor market has been incorporated to the Commission (*Subcomisión de Evaluación de Centros, SEC*) reporting in the DOCENTIA and institutional evaluation procedures.
- The new ACPUA procedure for institutional evaluation (*Programa PACE-SGC*) provides that a professional/representative of labor market must be part of the review panels, being present during the site visit.
- The inclusion of stakeholders other than those from the universities in the review panels will be a general rule for the second round (re-accreditation) of study programmes (from the end of 2018).

B) INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS IN THE DESIGN OF METHODOLOGIES:

As regards the development of new quality assurance processes, ACPUA tries to integrate the different stakeholders in the different phases of the process. The **ACPUA + Society** Programme is concerned with the effectiveness of these measure. A schedule of informative sessions will be established, as well as reasonable time for commenting the new designs. The meta-evaluation process must be much more interactive (not only done through surveys). In order to fine-tune the evaluation schemes, the Agency shall display always involving key stakeholders.

FACTS:

- Based on these premises, a stakeholders consultation plan has been scheduled before launching in 2018 three new programmes:

- HEIs institutional evaluation (Programa PACE-SGIC)
- Postgraduate accreditation (*including pilot*)
- University Research Institutes reaccreditation

Example: In the design phase of the protocol for reaccreditation of University Research Institutes, the following milestones have taken place:

Meeting of the *Comisión de Evaluación, Certificación y Acreditación* 12/02/15

“Brain storming” meeting with research experts 15/05/17

Meetings with the Government of Aragon: jan. 2017

Presentation of the protocol draft to Institutes: 12/02/18

2nd. Meeting of the *Comisión de Evaluación, Certificación y Acreditación* 22/02/18

Open consultation phase: 01-31/03/18

- As of 2019, the ACPUA Committees more committed to reflection and improvement of the processes (Such as *Comité de Expertos* and *Comisión de Evaluación, Certificación y Acreditación*) will seek to incorporate representatives of society as members.

C) REFORMING LEGAL FRAMEWORK: LAWMAKER AS STAKEHOLDER

In 2016 the ENQA review panel highlighted: “ACPUA works in a highly regulated environment” (p. 14). This reality has become even more evident from the moment the Agency is progressively widening the breadth of quality assurance activities after registration in EQAR in december 2016. Due to the multiplicity of evaluation processes, the legal framework is always more complex.

For this reason, the Agency has made a great effort to approach the Government bodies and explain the tasks we perform. The programme **ACPUA + Society** specially underlines the connection with the representatives of the citizens. For obvious reasons, lawmaker should be a relevant stakeholders in the coming years.

FACTS:

- For the first time in the history of ACPUA, its Director appeared before the regional Parliament (*Cortes de Aragón*). One it was done at the request of the political parties; another, at the request of the Government (2017).
- For the first time, a Members of the regional Parliament have met with the ENQA panel on the occasion of the Progress Visit (2018).
- Since 2016 ACPUA is actively participating in the preparatory work for drafting regional laws: the Aragon Science and Innovation Act (*Ley de Ciencia*) and the new Aragon Higher Education Act (*Ley de Universidades de Aragón*). According to the draft bill of *Ley de Ciencia* ACPUA is evolving into a central agency for the assessment of Aragon scientific system agents and entities.

D) DEVELOPING A QUALITY CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOCIETY

The ENQA panel commended the Agency “for the organization and facilitation of seminars and other disseminations activities which area clearly appreciated by stakeholders”. The programe ACPUA + Society encourages perseverance in these distinctive feature of ACPUA, trying to ensure that the impact of these activities reaches the most external circle of stakeholders (social and economic agents, families, etc.).

DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES AND NETWORKING:

- **Plan A / ACPUA workshops:**
 - 24 mayo 2016/ Sede ACPUA. Presentación proceso renovación de la Acreditación 2016. Isabel Ortega e Irene Melchor, Técnicas de calidad de ACPUA. Dirigido a Coordinadores de titulaciones de la U. de Zaragoza y U. San Jorge.
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 - 10 – 11 noviembre 2016/ Facultad de Derecho U. de Zaragoza. Simposio Internacional: La evaluación de la Investigación en Derecho. Participan, entre otros, Miguel Ángel Galindo, Director de ANECA; Antonio Serrano, Director de ACPUA; Martí Casadesús Fà, Director de AQU Catalunya, Lorenzo Zoppoli, Catedrático U. Federico II de Nápoles.
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 - 17 noviembre 2016/ sede de la Universitat d'Andorra de Sant Julià de Loria, Andorra. Cultura y garantía de la calidad en sistemas universitarios pequeños: la experiencia de Aragón. Por: Antonio Serrano, Director ACPUA.
 - 28 noviembre 2016/ Edificio Pignatelli. Acto institucional: Formación curricular en diseño para todas las personas en la Universidad. Colaboran: Fundación ONCE, CRUE, Real Patronato sobre Discapacidad y autores de las publicaciones.
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 - 28 noviembre 2016/ Edificio Pignatelli. Reunión técnica: Inclusión de los criterios de accesibilidad universal y el diseño para todas en la universidad. Jesús Hernández Galán, Director de Accesibilidad Universal e Innovación, Fundación ONCE y Maribel Campo, Coordinadora del proyecto.
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 - 26 enero 2017 / Sede de ACPUA. Sala videoconferencias. Agenda 2030: la Calidad Universitaria como Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS): un programa para las agencias. Presenta: Juan José Cubero Marín, experto en calidad y ex miembro de la CECA.
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 - 23 mayo 2017/ Sede de ACPUA. Sala videoconferencias. Los criterios y estándares europeos de calidad (ESG) en un entorno universitario diverso. Su utilidad y aplicación vistas desde Bruselas. Presenta: Teresa Sánchez Chaparro, colaboradora de ACPUA (ENQA, Bruselas) y experta internacional de la Commision des Titres d'Ingénierus (CTI, Paris).
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- 23 noviembre 2017/ Sala Bayeu, Edificio Pignatelli. El desarrollo técnico de la ordenación de enseñanzas universitarias en España. Presenta: Cristina Rodríguez Coarasa, Subdirectora General de Ordenación Académica del MECD.
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 - 24 noviembre 2017/ Universidad de la Rioja. La evaluación de la actividad investigadora. Sexenios. Por: Antonio Serrano Director ACPUA, Isabel Ortega Técnico de Calidad ACPUA, M^aJesús Yagüe Guillén, miembro del Comité de Garantías ACPUA.
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 - 16 mayo 2018/ Sala Pilar Sinués, Paraninfo Universidad de Zaragoza. Buenas prácticas docentes en formación y evaluación de competencias transversales. Vicerrectorado de Política Académica y la ACPUA.
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 - 28 febrero 2018/ Sala Joaquin Costa, Paraninfo Universidad de Zaragoza. Sesión informativa: Programa de Acreditación Institucional. Universidad de Zaragoza y ACPUA.
- **Plan B / Annual Plan for series of informal meetings with employers** (CEO of companies, thematic clusters related to research and innovation, etc.). **TO BE IMPLEMENTED 2019.**

This initiative responds to a concern and real need felt by our staff: due to various circumstances, the world of the QA in higher education seems to be distant and not too “exciting” for employers. This issue was raised during the Progress Visit. This Plan B is based on the idea that by launching a series of informal meetings and interviews with employers, we will make the program **ACPUA + society** attractive.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

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.

For ACPUA it is a matter of special concern the analysis of information (obtained in the course of our work) on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scopes of a single process. The ENQA panel wrote in 2016: “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 will be welcome” (p. 20).

This concern is shared by the rest of the Spanish agencies and stakeholders. For this reason, the Spanish Network of Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU) has created in 2017 a specific working group whose purpose is to undertake in a coordinated way this type of thematic analysis. ACPUA is one of the five agencies that are part of this group (the others are ACSUCYL, Unibasq, ANECA and AQU Catalunya). The REACU Board of Directors has accepted in 2018 its proposal to prepare a nationwide thematic analyse of the strengths and weakness of the current Spanish degree system on the basis of results of the programm evaluations conducted by all the Spanish agencies. ACPUA will be closely involved in the project and shall allocate resources to it.

Along with this REACU project, which tries to achieve the goal of producing valuable reviews in cooperation with other Spanish agencies, ACPUA wishes to start another one of regional dimensions. Given that the ACPUA programme accreditation reports identify good practices, our intention is to build a **catalog of good practices** developed by the Aragonese programmes, specially those focused on the Student Centre Learning (ESG, P. I). Currently we are collaborating with the institutions in the preparatory work.

Insertion of graduates into the labour market / Graduates Follow-up Project

Among the functions of the ACPUA entrusted by Law 5/2005, of 14 June, on the Organisation of the University System of Aragon, is that of "Monitoring the labour market insertion of graduates". The University System of Aragon has so far lacked a systematic programme to monitor university graduates, so that the studies carried out have been punctual with the consequent loss of comparability. In order to overcome this weakness, ACPUA has taken in the last two years major steps forward:

In collaboration with the University of Zaragoza and its Social Council, San Jorge University, the Aragon Institute of Statistics and the General Directorate for Higher Education (the signing of the Framework Agreement between all these parties had took place in 2015), the ACPUA is developing a systematic follow-up project about employability of university graduates from the University System of Aragon. With the help of an external company responsible to carry out fieldwork, the results of the survey on labour market insertion of SUA graduates in the academic year 2013-2014 have been assessed and analysed during 2018.

The panel urged in 2016 “the Agency and the regional Government to invest enough resources to further develop this area” (p. 20). This project is being economically sustainable for the Agency, since both the Government of Aragon and the universities themselves collaborate in its financing. By developing this project, ACPUA has followed the suggestion of the ENQA panel: “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*” (p. 19).

INCREASING RESOURCES

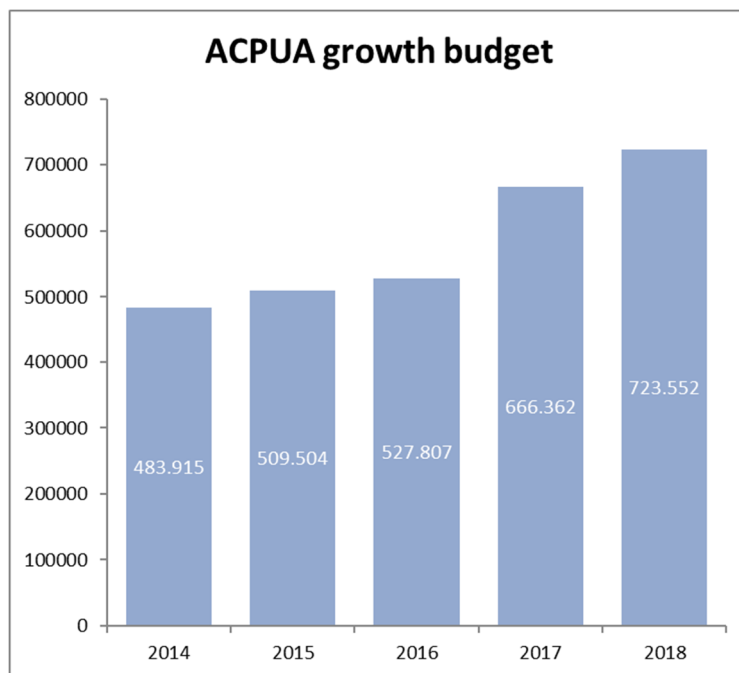
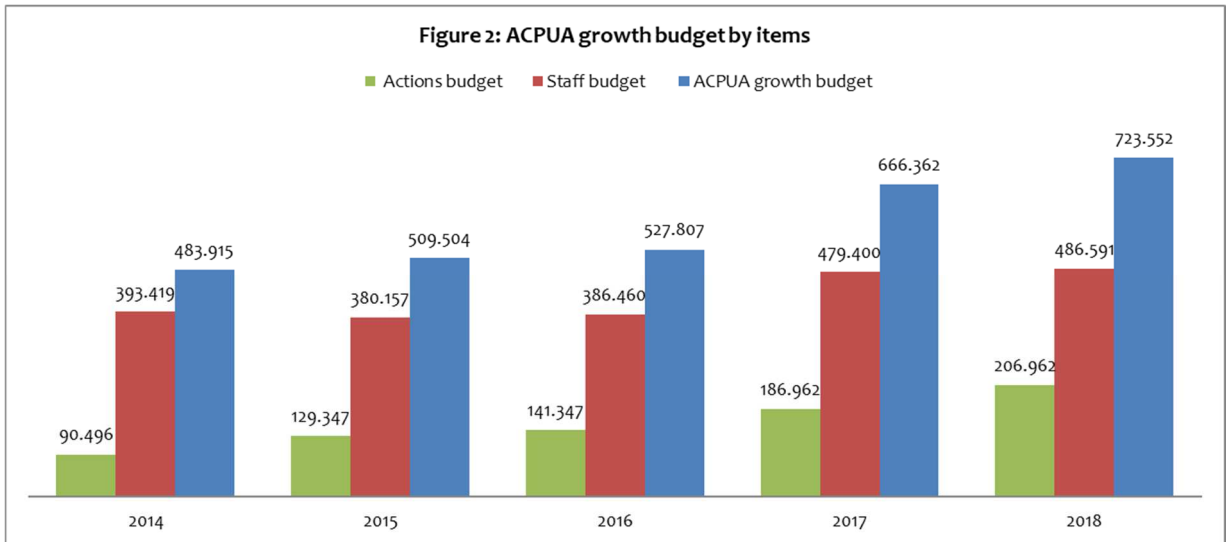
3.5. The panel recommends that ACPUA reflects about the necessary resources in the light of longer term achievement of strategic goals and the expansion of activities. Hence, the panel recommends that the agency tries to anticipate the impact of those activities on staff, not only in terms of staffing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

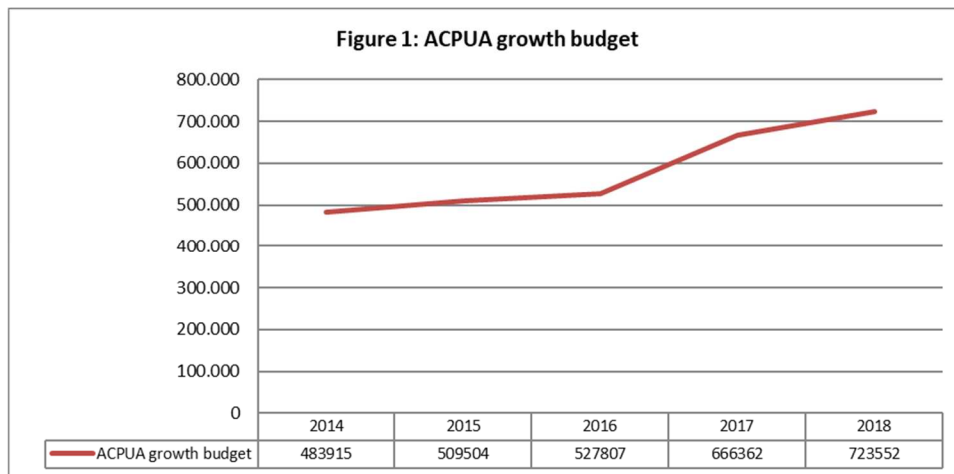
Also in relation to resources, the panel recommends that ACPUA considers the impact of the achievement of strategic goals on current activities and processes to ensure that it can adapt to work with possibly a larger number of stakeholders and also to the requirements of systems outside Aragon and Spain.

This was a very important recommendation. The statement of departure made by the ENQA panel was very clear: “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” (p. 21). But looking to the future and glimpsing the dynamic of growing activity of the Agency, the panel's concern for the Agency's resources was visible in many places in its Review Report: “While during the first years of its existence, ACPUA focused on thematic reports, the constraint with the number of other external quality assurance activities increased in recent years. Taking in account the expected increase in its activities in the future, the panel is unsure whether there will be enough resources to further development the area of thematic analysis in a systematic way in the future” (p. 20); “the panel, however, considers that the breadth of activities developed and the limited resources hinder the possibility of deeper reflection about the Agency’s role and self-improvement” (p. 15). “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 for the Agency... “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...” (p. 21).

These warnings have been taking in account by the Government of Aragon (the resources provided ACPUA have come from public funding). From 2016 to 2018 the budgetary situation

have improved tremendously. The ACPUA's resources have grown in 2017 by 26'25% (663.362 € compared to 527.807 € in 2016). And in 2018 the budget increases again (8,58%) (723.552,53).





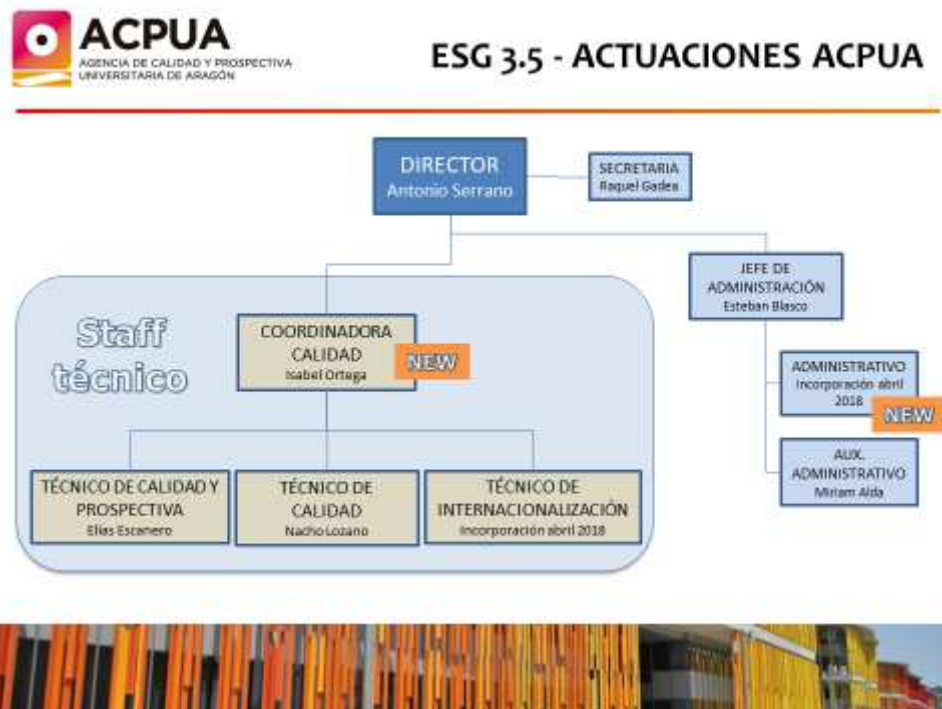
At the moment of the ENQA review “the Agency envisages in its strategic plan to attain a higher level of funding up to 2018, though it is unclear how feasible it is to attain this through traditional revenues. Hence the Board is considering some **revenue diversification**, namely by providing quality assessment services to institutions and users outside Aragon” (p. 13). Once again, the review report showed the agency an accurate path. As mentioned above, in 2017 ACPUA has started to provide **different evaluation services against payment** outside Aragon and Spain, mainly for institutions but also for regional Governments, agencies and research foundations:

- Universidad del País Vasco / 2016 / academic staff research
- Universidad de Cantabria / 2018 / teaching staff evaluation system audit
- Universidad de La Rioja / 2018 / academic staff research
- Government of Asturias / 2017 / research)
- AQU Catalunya / 2017 / study programm evaluation
- AQUA Andorra / since 2017 / study programm evaluation
- DANONE Foundation / 2017 / research

Following the recommendation of the ENQA panel, we try that the provision of these services outside the region does not entail an unbearable extra burden of work. At the present moment what ACPUA wants above all is to gain prestige and increase collaboration outside Aragon. Therefore we proceed step by step, cautiously.

Regarding human resources, this new budgetary situation allows to face the future with optimism. In 2016 the Director was supported by technical and administrative staff, composed of six people and divided equally by each area. In 2018 ACPUA has been strengthened by **two additional staff** (one for each area) in order to manage transition and growth phase. For bureaucratic reasons, these two new members should be effectively incorporated to the staff before the end of the year (2018).

It is very important to note here that this increase of the human resources [**Director + 4 technical staff + 4 administrative staff**] has been legally established (*Boletín Oficial de Aragón*, 20/09/2017). It is not a provisional measure. In 2016 the ENQA panel commended the Agency “for its new organisational structure which has introduced more clarity and transparency into the structure of the agency”. That new structure is now enlarged, legally recognised and consolidated:



After increasing and consolidating the staff, the description of the technical job positions has been innovative. The Agency has integrated the ESGs with the staff technical functions. By this measure the staff members follow the degree of compliance with some ESG previously assigned:

Integration of the ESGs in our team

DENOMINACIÓN	FUNCIONES
TÉCNICO/A COORDINADOR/A DE CALIDAD	Responsable del cumplimiento de los estándares europeos ESG 2.1 (obligación de que las evaluaciones de la agencia sirvan para comprobar el compromiso de las universidades con la calidad), ESG 2.2 (obligación de que los protocolos de evaluación estén bien diseñados), ESG 2.4 (obligación de que la Agencia forme adecuadamente a sus evaluadores) y ESG 3.6 (obligación de la Agencia de contar con un Sistema Interno de Garantía de la Calidad). Como responsable de la elaboración y correcta ejecución tanto del Plan Estratégico como del Plan de Actividades anual de la Agencia, organiza y coordina las diferentes tareas de carácter técnico, asegurando el correcto funcionamiento de los programas de la Agencia.
TÉCNICO/A DE CALIDAD E INTERNACIONALIZACIÓN	Responsable del cumplimiento del estándar europeo ESG 3.1 (obligación de la Agencia de seguir los protocolos europeos en materia de calidad universitaria). Responsable del cumplimiento del estándar europeo ESG 3.7 (obligación de la Agencia de someterse cada 5 años a una evaluación internacional). Responsable de la estrategia y de las relaciones internacionales de la Agencia. Responsable de la coordinación de los procesos de evaluación de la Agencia con un componente internacional o desarrollados fuera del SUA.
TÉCNICO/A DE CALIDAD DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN, INNOVACIÓN Y PROSPECTIVA	Responsable del cumplimiento del estándar europeo ESG 3.4 (obligación de la Agencia de hacer estudios sobre la calidad del sistema universitario). Responsable de la gestión de todos los procesos de evaluación y acreditación de la actividad investigadora de la Agencia.
TÉCNICO/A DE CALIDAD DE ENSEÑANZAS	Responsable del cumplimiento del estándar europeo ESG 3.3 (obligación de la Agencia de que las evaluaciones sobre enseñanzas y centros del SUA se ejecuten cumpliendo con los criterios europeos). Responsable de la gestión de todos los procesos de evaluación y acreditación relacionados con las enseñanzas universitarias.

We are aware of the need for staff development and training “in order to manage transition effectively” (recommendation 3.5). The Agency has a training Plan for its staff, which we have been adapted to the training needs derived from the increasing multiplicity of activities. For instance, new technician (Elías Escanero) has received highly specialized training (Master en Evaluación y Gestión de la Calidad de la UOC) while the senior technician (Isabel Ortega) has received formation from ENQA (training of agency reviewers), ECA (mutual recognition of accreditation results) or EUA (Ten principles for enhancing learning & teaching at the European level). To extend the training Plan to the administrative area it is very important for us. Everyone receive English language classes and, if possible, attends workshops and seminars related to the new evaluation processes.

The panel considered in 2016 that “the breadth of activities and the limited resources hinders the possibility of deeper reflexion 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)”.

Although we have increased our financial and human resources and the attitude of the staff is always very positive, this problem of lack of time for reflection surely persists. We have to improve this aspect in the near future.

QUALITY CULTURE AND WORKING TOGETHER

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.

Analyzing ESG 3.6 the ENQA panel commended the “Agency for the open and willing attitude of the staff to work the university system and other stakeholders in Aragon as agent of change and development, particularly in terms of quality culture”. At the same time the panel recommended that the Agency “strengthens its collaboration with other Agencies to consolidate its achievements and to foster a continuous awareness about possible limitations, areas of improvement and necessary changes” (p. 23). Later in the review report, when analyzing compliance with ESG 2.1, 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,..., 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 with the higher education communities”.

One again, looking to developments that are now taking place, the panel in 2016 has put on notice some important aspects to reinforce:

A) Collaboration with other Agencies

Following the recommendation, as new evaluation activities and challenges were presented, ACPUA has strengthened its collaboration with other national and international agencies and networks and association in the last two years:

- **With ACSUG Galicia:** Regular meetings and joint organisation of seminars and workshops, especially on monitoring the labor insertion of graduates (2018).
- **With AQU Catalunya:** ACPUA has conducted a Master ex ante evaluation. Close institutional relation regarding preparation of new methodologies (evaluation and prospective), exchange of experts, joint organisation of workshops, etc.
- **With DEVA-AAC:** Meetings in Zaragoza (2017) and Córdoba (2018).
- **With Fundación Madridmasd:** Workshop with students in Zaragoza (2016).
- **With AVAP:** The two teams met in 2016 in Zaragoza. ACPUA shared in Alicante 2017 with AVAP experiences about participation of students in our evaluation tasks.
- **With AQUIB:** The two teams met in 2016 in Zaragoza.
- **With ACCUE:** The two teams met in 2018 in Zaragoza.
- **With AQUA (Andorra):** ACPUA has signed 2 Memoranda of Understanding and is developing program evaluation activities for AQUA. We are partners in an INQAAHE project. Joint organisation of workshops and conferences.
- **With ENQA:** ACPUA hosts the ENQA Member's Forum 2018. ACPUA participates frequently in its activities and seminars.
- **With EQAR:** participating in DEQAR Project (Gran Agreement 2017 2871)
- **With INQAAHE:** ACPUA is now full member and we are partners of the AQUA Capacity Building Project (2017-2018) "Making connections between the Institutional Evaluation and the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations). Empowering stakeholders for quality enhancement".
- **With ECA:** ACPUA is now full member and participates in WG2 and other activities (joint programmes evaluation).

Besides these bilateral actions with other agencies, ACPUA invites to all the Spanish agencies to come to Zaragoza to share points of view on special issues: e-learning (CINAIC 2017), student orientation (CIOU 2018).

In short, ACPUA has been fostering collaboration with other agencies through:

- Joint organization of training workshops for students. Thanks to this activity, the students of the Aragonese institutions can participate in panels and evaluation committees of other Spanish agencies.
- Exchange of experiences resulting from the evaluation processes.
- Joint organization of workshops and seminars with the participation of stakeholders from the agencies involved.

Special mention should be made of the specific work that Spanish agencies carry out within the **Network REACU**. The activity within the Spanish Network has been particularly intense

in the last two years. This is due mainly to the effective deployment in Spain of the institutional evaluation: the agencies have worked in a very collaborative way on the design of a common methodology for evaluation. ACPUA has actively participated in these discussions. Currently the agency is part of the following working groups that were created by REACU plenarium in 2017: WG1 (Thematic analysis) - WG 4 (institutional evaluation) – WG5 (postgraduate program evaluation).

B) Working together with the institutions

The recent activation in Spain of the institutional evaluation is a great opportunity to advance in the development of a culture of quality at the regional level:

The institutional accreditation approach to the centre (faculty, school, etc.) supposes a declaration of principles of the legislator, when committing to an intermediate stage between the accreditation of all the degrees and the accreditation of the entire institution through a more gradual process that allows taking advantage of the synergies of the verification and renewal of the accreditation of degrees on which it has worked in recent years.

Likewise, this evolutionary model of programmes to centres enables deepening in the process of co-responsibility between the quality guarantee of the academic training that corresponds to the higher education institutions, and the consolidation of said quality assumed by the external evaluation bodies.

This increase in the transfer of responsibility to the universities in the processes of quality assurance has the sole purpose of protecting the student and the society.

The shift towards the institutional accreditation of the centres benefits from the experience developed by many Spanish universities in the development and evaluation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems, such as, for example, the AUDIT model. This experience has favoured the development of a culture of internal quality in the institutions that positively reverts to the processes of accreditation of degrees in the phase of design or verification, monitoring and renewal of accreditation.

(from ACPUA **PROGRAMA PACE-SGIC** 2018)

PACE – SGIC is our new programme for the certification of internal quality assurance systems of university centers. It was designed in 2017 on the basis of REACU methodology and after consultation with stakeholders. After the approval of this tool, we hope that in 2018 at least two centers of the University of Zaragoza will be accredited. But what is even more important at the moment: Aragonese HEIs has taken very seriously this alternative model to the traditional study program accreditation. University management is encouraging the participation of the centers at the PACE-SGIC program. To achieve this purpose, the interaction with us is very fluid. Therefore, we are confident that the Agency can help faculties and schools to develop “a robust and attentive quality culture that may sustain the delegation of major responsibilities to them, regarding the monitoring and continuous improvement of programmes” (Progress Visit report).

To move towards this goal, the advances that have taken place, in the last two years, in the implementation of the program DOCENTIA (Teaching activity evaluation system audit) are also helpful. In 2017 the University of Zaragoza has submitted its implementation model to ACPUA.

The work of enhancement of the Agency has been remarkable within this process. During the last two years numerous meetings with the institutions -at various levels of dialogue- have taken place. We want to highlight here the meetings we have had with students and staff. Particularly important for us were the three **Bottom/up sessions** that we organized with them in June 2017. The more than 20 proposals for improvement that were identified in those sessions in some way represented an interesting point of convergence of new QA policies (institutional accreditation) and the student's vision on SCL:

- 1 junio 2017/ Sala Polivalente, Expo Empresarial. Zaragoza. Focus Group: “Diálogos con ACPUA”. Coordinación y dinamización de las sesiones: Isabel Ortega e Irene Melchor, Técnicas de Calidad ACPUA.
- 6 junio 2017/ Edificio del rectorado de Teruel. Focus Group: “Diálogos con ACPUA”. Coordinación y dinamización de las sesiones: Isabel Ortega e Irene Melchor, Técnicas de Calidad ACPUA.
- 11 julio 2017/ Edificio del rectorado de Huesca. Focus Group: “Diálogos con ACPUA”. Coordinación y dinamización de las sesiones: Isabel Ortega e Irene Melchor, Técnicas de Calidad ACPUA.

Student centred learning



- Debe definirse un modelo educativo propio de la Universidad, que los centros puedan adoptar. Debe ser un modelo estable, compartido, explícito y que parta del bottom-up de los estudiantes y sensible a nuevos estilos de aprendizaje (cambio generacional)
- Motivación y formación del profesorado en cursos específicos
- El tamaño de los grupos deberían favorecer metodologías de aprendizaje activo.
- Se considera que se está dirigiendo demasiado a los estudiantes. No debería repletarse el tiempo de trabajo autónomo.
- Se considera que no se están enfocando bien los créditos ECTS. Los estudiantes dicen que no se miden correctamente.
- Se considera que influye mucho el tipo de asignatura
- Una buena práctica son los trabajos (y evaluaciones) integradas entre varias asignaturas o incluso titulaciones.
- Se plantea que debe escucharse a los estudiantes también informalmente.
- Se debe fomentar la creatividad y el trabajo autónomo con el diseño de actividades autónomas interesantes y fácilmente evaluables
- Se debe ser más permisivo con el entorno, incluir prácticas en empresas, y diseñar titulaciones flexibles con optatividad abierta.
- Se debe potenciar la participación de los estudiantes en diferentes foros, con reuniones concretas para diferentes temas.
- Incentivar la participación de los estudiantes haciéndoles ver que sus propuestas se escuchan y atienden.
- Se plantea la posibilidad de que ACPUA y la Universidad elaboren catálogos de buenas prácticas.
- Se plantea crear actividades de innovación docente, implicando al estudiante e incentivando la participación de profesores en las mismas.
- Reflexión de los estudiantes: los estudiantes deben empoderarse y tomar conciencia de que la Universidad es una oportunidad y no un mero trámite. Sentada esta base consideran que:
 - En la universidad se hacen cosas para los estudiantes pero sin ellos.
 - Debe replantearse la evaluación continua que ahora mismo ahoga al estudiante
 - Debe adaptarse la docencia a la realidad
 - Se deben plantear trabajos atractivos a los estudiantes (por ejemplo, estudiando casos de su entorno...)
 - Flexibilizar y dar alternativas de evaluación y comunicación.
 - Demandan que se les escuche, y se actúe en consecuencia.

C) Student Centred Learning: introducing the social dimension

The ENQA panel recommended: “more attention should be given to a student centred learning and assessment practices”. On the one hand, this recommendation has inspired the writing of the program **PACE – SGIC** on institutional accreditation. On the other hand, we have made efforts for taking more in consideration both the extent of which the learning and assessment methodologies are adjusted to the profile of the students and the degree of student’s academic progress and their satisfaction. **The improvement of the ACPUA evaluation methodology for the second round of the study program accreditation** (starting December 2018 – January 2018) should be significant in this regard. This “second round” evaluation for the reaccreditation of programs in Aragon will put more emphasis on these issues, specially during the site visit.

In addition, the Agency is very interested in introducing at regional level the QA social dimension. This social dimension is addressed at least in three Part I standards: ESG 1.3, ESG 1.5 and ESG 1.6. However, it is clear that for a proper assessment of them from the social perspective is necessary to develop actions in relation to standards 2.4 (additional training on these issues for the ACPUA experts) and 3.6 (we need also an appropriate training of the staff). For this reason, ACPUA participates in the program “Formación para todos” of the Fundación ONCE, and a training session for experts has already been held in this area (<http://www.aragonhoy.net/index.php/mod.noticias/mem.detalle/area.1019/id.190533>).

INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS

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

The ENQA panel was “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 particular significant in the Spanish national context” (p. 35). We are happy with this observation and we are trying to extend this initiative to other ACPUA committees. But this is not a simple task, precisely because of the characteristics of the Spanish context. Unlike the research evaluation (a much more internationalized field, in which every year we increase the participation of international experts), the evaluation of programs and institutions still requires a good knowledge of the Spanish language and good knowledge of the Spanish teaching system. Despite this, since 2016 we are gradually introducing international evaluators in our study program evaluation panels. Our intention is to accelerate the pace of introduction of international experts from 2019 and for the new procedures of institutional evaluation and (“second tour”) reaccreditation of study programmes.

REPORTS: CONSISTENCY AND REASONING

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.

Regarding the production of reports, the ENQA panel found that “ACPUA has made a significant effort to develop more consistent, structured and helpful reports” (p. 37). “The quality of the reports is satisfactory overall” but “visible differences in the level of detail and the substantiation of overall evaluation exist” (p. 37). By these reasons, consistency is recommended under ESG 2.6 and coherence is recommended under ESG 2.1. In both cases the ENQA panel expressly alludes to the multiplicity of evaluation procedures and “the expected growth in the number of type of activities”.

Consistency and coherence between the different ACPUA reports is indoubtely a complex issue that worries us. The increase in ACPUA activities since 2016 constitute, in effect, and added risk factor. In several cases, the report model is dictated by the legal framework of the evaluation procedure (v.g., study programm accreditation in the field of arts); in other cases, the report model is terribly conditioned in its structure by technical or even software aspects (v.g., the initial study programm accreditation, where the production of the report is subject to the computer patterns of the nationwide tool VERIFICA).

To minimize these inconveniences and ensure the consistency and consistency of its reports, ACPUA has recently launched the **Programa META**, which aims to create a harmonious framework for the differents models of reports (evaluations ex ante, ex post and follow up). The technical staff and the ACPUA *Comité de Evaluación, Certificación y Acreditación* (responsible for the approval of evaluation methodologies and procedures) are working right now on this.

PROGRAMA META

(some basic rules regarding consistency and coherence between the different ACPUA reports)

- The rationale behind the score must be clearly and substantial outlined.
- Reports always lead to a clear conclusion.
- Mainly formal phrases cannot describe the outcome of a evaluation.
- A report of good practices has to be generalized.
- After homogenizing the reports, feedback about the adapted reports must be provided from the Committees to the review panels.
- By meta-evaluation processes, the communication between the different Committees has to be more fluid.

The agency hopes that with the approval of this Programa META in 2019 the consistency and coherence of the different models of reports will be guaranteed.

In the meantime, we want to highlight in this report the important and perhaps surprising task that the **ACPUA Appeals Committee** (*Comité de Garantías*) is doing in this field. This Appeals Committee has been operating for a relatively short time and its volume of activity is not very large, since the number of claims is very low. However, it is remarkable that its decisions and recommendations are helping to increase in general the consistency of reports. The *Comité de Garantías* ensures that every the decision is well founded. One appeals serves as study case. Feedback to the review panels and committes is provided. The consequence is that reasoning, consistency and coherence of the evaluations are greater.

ANNEX

PROGRESS VISIT: PANEL REPORT AND AGENDA

A) European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) follow-up visit to ACPUA, Aragon, Spain. Panel report

Introduction

ACPUA (in full) underwent its first ENQA review in February 2016. The report on the review led to ACPUA's success in becoming a member of ENQA and also in being listed on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

Follow-up: purpose and conduct of the visit

In 2016, ENQA introduced the follow-up element to its review process, with a view to providing an enhancement focus on the action plan and any changes to the reviewed Agency. The process is a voluntary one. ACPUA signalled its intention to participate in a follow-up process and thus became the first member Agency of ENQA to undertake this part of the review process.

The chair (Fiona Crozier, QAA UK) and secretary (Pedro Teixeira, University of Porto, Portugal) of the original review panel revisited the Agency in March 2018. In advance of the visit, they agreed that the focus of the event would be one of enhancement, aimed at assisting ACPUA to take stock of the actions it had taken so far, following the review, and at allowing the Agency to look forward to its next review by ENQA in 2021.

ACPUA, with the full agreement of the panel chair and secretary, took responsibility for the programme for the visit, though the Panel has provided regular feedback on its structure, content, and invitees. The visit began with the Agency's analysis of the usefulness of the original ENQA review report and consisted of meetings with Agency's staff and external stakeholders, some of whom had met the panel before.

Findings

Through the visit and the discussions, the panel gained a clear sense of the progress made by the Agency against recommendations and of the high level of attention to the details contained in the review report. It was apparent that ACPUA had worked extremely hard to take into account the recommendations made and also to focus on how those recommendations might lead to improvement rather than merely provide an exercise in 'box-ticking.'

The review report had been received very positively and was regarded by ACPUA as being very useful. The aspects that were particularly appreciated were the realistic tone

of the report that tried to instill in the work of the Agency a careful monitoring of the growth of activities and its consequences for sustainability, as well as the need to strengthen its resources to sustain that envisaged growth. Hence, the Agency reported that the report has been widely used over the last two years. There has been a visible increase in the financial and human resources allocated to the Agency, sustained by a growing and broad political support at the regional level for the role of the Agency. This may also be observed in the likely allocation of additional responsibilities to the Agency regarding research, though this is still under discussion among policy-makers.

The panel offered further support in the following areas:

Purposes of QA

As in many other parts of Europe, in Spain there is a growing move from accountability to enhancement in the purposes underlying quality assurance. By July of 2017, the first cycle of evaluation ended and institutional evaluation has come to the forefront of discussions about accreditation in Aragon and in Spain. Furthermore, there has been some clarification of the roles of ANECA and of the regional agencies, with the former being allocated a more subsidiary role and the latter a primary role. However, these are very different evaluation processes and pose significant challenges. On the other hand, it reinforces the necessity to work with universities, something that it was already mentioned in the review report and to which ACPUA has devoted significant attention in recent years.

The interaction with universities will be very important in the growth of processes of accreditation for internal quality assurance systems in institutions and for institutional evaluation. In both cases, this will mean trying to help faculties and departments to develop a robust and attentive quality culture that may sustain the delegation of major responsibilities to them regarding the monitoring and continuous improvement of programmes.

Another important dimension of collaboration with universities is the follow-up of graduates and of their transition to the labour market and employability, an area that may be also very relevant in raising the awareness among external stakeholders about the relevance and impact of QA processes in Aragon and in Spain.

Multiplication of Evaluation Processes

The growth of activities and the diversification of processes has become a relevant challenge for the Agency. On the one hand, this has been the result of successful review that has included in the Agency's activities the ex-ante review of programmes. On the other hand, there has been a significant growth in research evaluation and pressure related to the evaluation of teaching staff. Moreover, there are prospective changes with the forthcoming regional law of science that will also allocate additional tasks to ACPUA.

One of the important challenges relates to the review of postgraduate programs. Postgraduate education has been through significant changes and it is regarded as being insufficiently flexible. Thus, the Agency, together with other Spanish agencies, has been discussing how to balance the educational and research dimensions of these reviews. On the one hand, these programmes have a strong research component, especially since before the Bologna process they were mainly focused on the development on individual research projects of each student. In terms of the review process, and although some synergies may exist between processes, it also requires an adaptation of staff, reviewers, processes to new procedures and purposes.

Additionally, the Agency has been developing some work outside Aragon, as was already seen at the time of the review. This has not constituted a major commitment and it has contributed to the recognition and confidence of the Agency. Furthermore, it has also contributed to nurture the collaboration with other Agencies in Spain.

Preparation of the new Strategic Plan

ACPUA has started the preparations for its forthcoming Strategic Plan. The panel considers that this document should be articulated with the annual activity plans and should set out in what way the latter monitors and analyses the extent of which the Agency is progressing according to its priorities and milestones defined in the Strategic Plan. This would also require making the Annual Plan becomes more analytical and not merely a description of the operational activity throughout the year. This should assist the Agency to monitor its progress annually and over the period of the strategic plan.

Conclusions

The panel believes that allowing the Agency to take control of the agenda and the site visit worked extremely well, allowing the focus of the event to be on the Agency's view of how and where it was improving but leaving room for discussion and input from the panel. It also mitigated against the event becoming review-focused. The panel was able to engage in dialogue with the Agency and its stakeholders.

The panel hopes that the short feedback provided in this report, as well as the visit itself, will enable ACPUA to continue working effectively to fulfil the goals set out in its action plan and to move towards effective preparation for its next ENQA review.

The panel would like to thank ACPUA for the openness and transparency with which it approached the process and wishes the Agency every success in the future.

Fiona Crozier and Pedro Teixeira

April 2018

