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# ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM IN CASTILLA Y LEÓN (ACSUCYL)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the compliance of the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL) with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) parts 2 and 3. The report is based on an ENQA coordinated peer review. Based on this report ACSUCYL will apply for the renewal of its membership of ENQA and its registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The site visit of the peer review panel in charge of the evaluation of the compliance with the ESG took place between June 25 and 29 2019.

ACSUCYL performs a broad range of quality assurance activities, varying from the level of the individual professor and study programme to university centres (faculties or schools), research institutes and entire institutions. Based on the Terms of Reference for this review (see Annex 2), the panel has analysed the verification, modification, follow-up, and renewal of accreditation of official degrees; certification of the implementation of internal quality assurance systems and institutional accreditation (Elenchos), the teaching performance assessment programme (Docentia), the evaluation of university centres and the ex-ante and periodic evaluation of university research institutes. The latter activity is not considered by the panel to be within the scope of the ESG and is thus not further considered in the panel's evaluation of the agency's compliance with the ESG.

The other activities mentioned in the Terms of Reference for this review, however, clearly fall within the scope of the ESG. The opinion of the panel is that for those activities the agency fully complies with ESG 2.3, 2.5, 2.7, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.7 and substantially complies with ESG 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6. ACSUCYL clearly has significant experience in the implementation of quality assurance processes as defined in Part 2 of the ESG and taking into account Part 1.

Overall, the panel concludes that ACSUCYL has become a well-established agency which has gained trust from the Government and from the higher education institutions. All stakeholders recognise ACSUCYL's very efficient and supportive staff. Although the agency has faced severe budget and staff cuts due to the economic crisis, it has managed to perform a broad range of external quality assurance activities for the universities in Castilla y León. The agency has worked hard to optimize its broad range of procedures within the very detailed legislative frameworks, as well as to reduce the level of bureaucracy in the system. High expectations are voiced in relation to the potential reduction of bureaucracy and workload of the new Elenchos programme which implementation has recently started. Under this programme higher education institutions may request accreditation of the education activities at centre level (faculty or school) upon certification of the centre's internal quality assurance system and once renewal of accreditation of at least half of their bachelors' and half of their masters' programmes has been accomplished.

The regional Government has recently committed to increasing the agency's staff complement by 3 additional staff. This should allow the agency to undertake work beyond the implementation of external quality assurance procedures. The panel invites the agency to reflect about the best use it can make of these additional resources in the context of the recently commenced process to draft the new strategic plan for the coming 5 years. The panel encourages the Governing Board to use this process to define an ambitious strategy for the agency, and to search for the full support of the Regional Government, ideally translated in multi-annual commitments, not only for the number of staff, but for the whole budget.

One of the priorities in a new strategic plan should be the further development of thematic analyses in which the agency analyses the results of its work and transforms those results into valuable knowledge for the higher education community in Castilla y León, for the Regional Government and possibly beyond. The agency indicated internationalisation as a priority for the future. The panel agrees that it is important to bring in international expertise, not only for the development of the agency's strategy, but also in each individual assessment procedure to provide new perspectives and to stimulate innovation and international benchmarking. While efforts to involve stakeholders, particularly students, and to improve gender balance by involving more women in the different bodies of the agency are already showing positive results, the panel still sees potential to further increase their participation and thus the diversity of perspectives in the policy making and work of the agency.

Within the whole external quality assurance system in Castilla y León and in Spain in general, the panel notices a strong focus on accountability and on quantitative indicators. Notwithstanding the agency's constructive reports with appreciated suggestions for improvement, the panel believes a further shift towards a more qualitative approach in every step of internal and external quality assurance may be useful, leading to self-critical self-assessment reports, ever increasing attention for student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; external reports with relevant information about the profile and quality of the unit under review and with good practices providing sufficient information to inspire others, reports which provide valuable inputs to make thematic analyses and finally a fully internalised quality culture within the whole higher education system in Castilla y León. The panel recognises the potential of institutional accreditation to move in this direction, but to make full use of this potential, a conscious choice, and even a paradigm shift, would be needed, both within the approach of government and of the agency. Procedures would need to focus much more on a strategic approach on results and less on a detailed analysis of inputs and processes. This would also require a shift in the level of detail in regulatory frameworks, which should allow the agency to develop independently its own procedures which are fit for purpose.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of Agencia Para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León (ACSUCYL) with the 2015 version of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted in a period from May 2019 to October 2019.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA and EQAR require all member and listed agencies respectively to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they carry out their work as an agency in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

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

### MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2014 REVIEW

The panel found that the agency generally complies with the ESG. The agency fully complied with ESG 2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6, and 3.8. It substantially complied with ESG 2.2, 2.4, 2.8, 3.1, and 3.7.

Also some points of attention were mentioned:

- ESG 2.2: ACSUCYL should consider how universities in Castilla y León could be more actively involved in the design and development of new quality assurance processes.
- ESG 2.4: The Agency should remain vigilant to ensure that ex-post degree programme accreditations are carried out in accordance with established European best practices regarding the time spent per programme, the size and profile of the expert team, etc, so as to ensure an appropriate level of analysis.
- ESG 2.4: The Agency should be proactive in initiating a debate at the regional and national level in order to consider the global fitness for purpose of the Spanish EQA system as well as the opportunity of a shift to institutional or audit reviews.
- ESG 2.8: The Agency should consider involving stakeholders in a discussion about what sort of system-wide analysis is needed at the Castilla y León level and is feasible under the Agency's current economic circumstances and whether more work in this area can be done on a national scale.
- ESG 3.4: ACSUCYL should carefully consider the coherence between the financial resources available and the fitness for purpose of the current ex-post programme accreditation scheme.
- ESG 3.8: ACSUCYL should pursue its efforts to strengthen student involvement. Specifically, the specific role of the newly created Student Committee should be clarified, as well as their actual capacity to provide useful feedback for the Agency.
- Criterion 8: The Agency should consider revising its appeals procedure so a separate committee handles this process and not the commission that is responsible for running the review processes.

### REVIEW PROCESS

The 2019 ENQA coordinated review of ACSUCYL was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of

Reference of this review (found in annex 2 of this report). The panel for the external review of ACSUCYL was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Pdraig Walsh (Chair – ENQA nominee), Chief Executive, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- Pieter-Jan van de Velde (Secretary – ENQA nominee), Independent consultant in finance and quality assurance (part-time), Co-director at Trividend (a social impact investment fund)
- Maria del Mar Campins Eritja (EUA nominee), Full Professor, University of Barcelona, Spain
- Inguna Blese (ESU nominee), Master's student in Educational Management, University of Latvia, Member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool

Milja Homan, project officer of ENQA, acted as review coordinator.

ACSUCYL produced a self-assessment report which provided a substantial portion of the evidence that the panel used to draw its conclusions. The panel conducted a site visit to validate fully the self-assessment and clarify any points at issue. Finally, the review panel produced this final report based on the self-assessment report, site visit, and its findings. In doing so, it provided an opportunity for ACSUCYL 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. Some stakeholders preferred to intervene in Spanish, but thanks to the great help of the translator all people the panel met could fully share their insights. Nor was all documentation available in English. The agency launched a new website just before the site visit. Although the accessibility of the information on the website has improved, this change did not allow to provide direct hyperlinks in the self-assessment report. The fact that the translation of the website into English had not been finalised at the moment of the site visit, also reduced the accessibility of information for the panel members with limited knowledge of the Spanish language. Nonetheless, the two panel members with knowledge of Spanish have analysed many documents which were available on the website and other documents which were provided by ACSUCYL in Spanish. They shared the conclusions of their findings with the other panel members. This allowed the panel as a whole to consult all necessary information.

### **Self-assessment report**

A first draft of the self-assessment report was prepared by the Head of International and Institutional affairs. Different stakeholders, including the ACSUCYL staff, its Advisory Board and Student Board, university staff, Government officials and external experts of the agency's assessment commissions, were asked for feedback on the draft report, before it was presented for approval to the Board of Directors in April 2019.

The self-assessment report was found informative and it served as a valuable source of information to the panel. Nevertheless, a more self-critical approach and a more in depth process involving stakeholders in the preparation of the report might have been useful, as well as a preliminary approach to the strategic options for the coming 5 years. The panel noted the agency's view that since the Strategic plan only comes to an end in December 2019, it was not possible to incorporate a full view of the aims reached when preparing the self-assessment report.

### **Site visit**

The Review panel spent four days in Valladolid (from June 25<sup>th</sup> until June 28<sup>th</sup> 2019). During the visit, the panel had the opportunity to meet with a wide range of stakeholders on the premises of ACSUCYL. Based on the site visit template, as suggested by the coordinator, the site visit was designed in close cooperation between the ACSUCYL staff and the panel. The visit was well planned

and organized. The programme included interview sessions with members of the Governing Board, including a representative of the regional Government; the director of ACSUCYL and all staff members, representatives of the higher education institutions located in the region, members of the agency's Advisory and Student Boards, its permanent Commissions, and members of review panels. The schedule of the meetings is available in Annex 1.

At the end of the site visit, the panel held an internal meeting where it agreed on the preliminary conclusions relating to the level of compliance of ACSUCYL on each of the standards in part 2 and 3 of the ESG. The secretary of the panel then drafted the report in cooperation with the rest of the panel. The draft report was submitted to ACSUCYL for factual verification in September 2019 and with reference to ENQA standards ACSUCYL was given two weeks to provide factual corrections on the report.

### **Scope of the review**

According to the Terms of Reference of the review the following activities of ACSUCYL had to be addressed in the external review:

- Verification of official degrees (ex-ante accreditation)/modification
- Follow-up of official degrees
- Renewal of accreditation of official degrees (ex-post accreditation)
- Institutional accreditation (ELENCHOS Programme)
- Certification of the implementation of the internal quality assurance system (ELENCHOS Programme)
- Teaching performance assessment programme (DOCENTIA Programme)
- Evaluation to create, recognize, modify or withdraw university centres
- University research institutes (ex-ante evaluation)
- Periodic evaluation of university research institutes.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY**

### **HIGHER EDUCATION**

The legal framework which regulates the university policy in Spain has its origin in the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and its article 27, which recognises university autonomy.

The Organic Law 6/2001 (LOU) of 21st December 2001, amended by Organic Law 4/2007 (LOMLOU) of 12th April 2007, sets out the basic regulations on a national scale establishing the respective powers and competencies of universities, the national government and the governments of the different Autonomous Communities. Royal Decree 43/2015 of 2 February further establishes the organisation of official university education.

The regulations governing the specific procedures in each of these areas is set out in a series of Royal Decrees, which make up the compulsory national legislation that must be complied with by all the autonomous regions that Spanish public administration is comprised of.

The tasks involving evaluation, certification and accreditation inherent to these procedures are assigned under the LOU to the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) and to the external assessment bodies set up by the regions, within the framework of their respective powers. Coordinating the assessment standards is the responsibility of the General Conference for University Policy which, for the specific case of degree accreditation created a University Committee for Regulating Follow-up and Accreditation (CURSA). In turn, the eleven agencies operating in Spain, one of which is national and the other ten regional, have joined together

to form the Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies (REACU) in an effort to cooperate in establishing common benchmarks.

Under the powers laid down in the LOU, the regional “Law 3/2003, of 28 March, governing universities in Castilla y León” created the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL) as the external assessment body for the higher education system in Castilla y León. Its structure and functions are established by regional Decree 15/2015 by which the ACSUCYL internal regulation is approved.

The University System in Castilla y León consist of 9 higher education institutions:

- 4 public universities
  - o University of Salamanca (°1218)
  - o University of Valladolid (°1292)
  - o University of León (°1979)
  - o University of Burgos (°1994)
- 5 private universities
  - o Pontifical University of Salamanca (°1940)
  - o IE University – Segovia (°1997)
  - o Santa Teresa de Jesús Catholic University of Ávila (°1998)
  - o Miguel de Cervantes European University – Valladolid (°2002)
  - o Isabel I de Castilla International University – Burgos (°2011)

The general rule is that the duration of Bachelor degrees (“Grados” in Spanish) is 240 ECTS, even though 180 ECTS degrees are allowed in some areas and there are specific degrees such as Medicine, Architecture, Pharmacy, Dentistry and Veterinary Sciences that require the completion of 300 - 360 ECTS.

The study programmes offered by the universities in Castilla y León cover all academic fields, all levels and all types of programmes. Table 1 offers data about the study programmes offered by each of the 9 universities in Castilla y León.

In the 2017-2018 academic year, 86.683 students were enrolled at universities in Castilla y León (for details see Table 1); 75% of them were enrolled at the public universities and 25% in private universities.

**Table 1: Size of the universities in Castilla y León**

University		Bachelor Students	Bachelor progr.	Master students	Master progr.	PhD students	PhD progr.
Salamanca	PUBLIC	21,056	71	1,813	77	2,334	40
Valladolid		18,938	54	1,248	59	1,393	29
León		9,241	39	1,093	38	520	16
Burgos		6,497	25	505	21	366	12
Pontifical University of Salamanca	PRIVATE	4,050	19	264	10	65	1
IE University		2,848	10	2,812	20	58	1
Catholic University of Ávila		2,279	14	407	16	0	0
Miguel Cervantes		1,849	18	450	6	0	0
Isabel I		5,168	11	1,429	5	0	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>71,926</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>10,021</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>2,736</b>	<b>99</b>

Source: Integrated University Information System (SIU) and University Register of Centres and Degrees (RUCT), as presented in the Self-Assessment Report.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

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

With regard to programme review, the Spanish Government has laid down that degrees and higher education qualifications must follow a system of verification (ex-ante accreditation), modification, monitoring and renewal of accreditation.

ACSUCYL also implements the voluntary evaluation schemes DOCENTIA (certification of quality assurance of teaching quality of academic staff at university level) and Elenchos (certification of internal quality assurance systems and accreditation at the level of university centres (faculties or schools)).

## ACSUCYL

Under the powers laid down in the LOU, the regional "Law 3/2003, of 28 March, governing universities in Castilla y León" created the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL) as the external assessment body for the higher education system in Castilla y León. ACSUCYL is endowed with its own capacity to work, its own assets enabling it to carry out its functions, as well as its own legal status as a public body governed by private law. ACSUCYL'S internal organisation and functioning are regulated by "Decree 15/2015, of 19 February, approving the regulations of the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León".

ACSUCYL's mission is the evaluation, accreditation and certification of all aspects of quality involved in the action undertaken by universities, research centres and higher education centres both inside and outside the Spanish autonomous community of Castilla y León, in the context of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), offering reliable information aimed at providing society with an insight into quality in the higher education system and helping those in charge thereof to make decisions geared towards enhancing its excellence. The agency thus endows the system with transparency, helps to convey information to society and contributes to the region's social development, thereby impacting the education and employability of its citizens.

## ACSUCYL'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

ACSUCYL is a public entity governed by private law (which gives it more administrative and financial autonomy) and accountable to the Regional Government of Castilla y León.

The **Board of Directors** is presided over by the regional minister responsible for universities at the Regional Government of Castilla y León, and is made up of representatives from the public authorities, universities and society. The Board is responsible for setting out the agency's Quality Policy, its Code of Ethics, its strategic plan and its annual action plan.

The **Advisory Board** acts as a consultative body, and is made up of ten experts of renowned competence and professional prestige in the academic, scientific and business fields.

The **Student Board** which is composed of nine students, one for each university in Castilla y León, is set up to foster and channel student involvement in the agency's activities.

The appeals and reviews of the assessments carried out are submitted to a **Guarantees Commission**, which also oversees that the processes are conducted properly.

The **Assessment Commissions** are the scientific/technical bodies which are responsible for the different evaluation schemes the agency performs. The agency has set up 4 Evaluation Committees:

- Degree Assessment Commission.
- Institutional Quality Assessment Commission.
- Research Assessment Commission.
- Teaching Staff Assessment Commission.

Each commission counts 10 members. They are mainly made up of (national) scientists and scholars from outside the higher education system in Castilla y León. The Institutional Quality Assessment Commission is complemented with one expert with a professional track record, and the Degree Assessment Commission with three experts with a professional track record.

In order to adequately carry out the tasks assigned to them, the assessment commissions may seek the advice of external experts, who act individually or as member of **panels** of 3 to 12 members.

#### **ACSUCYL'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES**

ACSUCYL's assessment programmes cover all aspects of university activities, and are based around four main areas of action, in accordance with the regulations governing the quality assurance procedures in the higher education system in which the agency works:

- Degrees
- Institutional quality
- Research
- Teaching staff

Each programme has its own legislative reference framework regulated by national government or by the Regional Government of Castilla y Leon. ACSUCYL has requested this review in order to apply for the renewal of its membership of ENQA and listing on EQAR. This review has analysed ACSUCYL's activities that are within the scope of the ESG as defined in the Terms of Reference for this review (see Annex 2). The following activities of ACSUCYL have been addressed in this external review:

- Verification of official degrees (ex-ante accreditation)/modification
- Follow-up of official degrees
- Renewal of accreditation of official degrees (ex-post accreditation)
- Institutional accreditation (Elenchos programme)
- Certification of the implementation of the internal quality assurance system (Elenchos programme)
- Teaching performance assessment programme (DOCENTIA programme)
- Evaluation to create, recognize, modify or withdraw university centres
- University research institutes (ex-ante evaluation)
- Periodic evaluation of university research institutes.

Based on the evaluation of the evidence provided and meetings with all relevant stakeholders the panel is of the opinion that the ex-ante and periodic evaluation of university research institutes should not be considered to be within the scope of the ESG. Although some references are made to education and dissemination, the focus of those assessments is research and the formal education programmes provided within/in cooperation with university research institutes are subject to other external quality assurance processes specifically oriented towards education. Therefore, the panel

does not assess the ex-ante and periodic evaluation of university research institutes against the ESG in this report.

The following programmes are considered to be within the scope of the ESG:

#### Programme level external reviews

Official university study programmes must undergo an external evaluation process conducted by ACSUCYL in several stages; the first stage, prior to implementation of the study programme (Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree and Doctorate studies) consists of verification of the proposal; this means mainly that the university may offer the programme and it leads to an official qualification. After the start of the implementation of the study programme, in the second stage, ACSUCYL carries out a follow-up procedure. In the third stage, once the study programme has been fully implemented, it must undergo a cyclical ex-post accreditation procedure in order to maintain its status as an official study programme (accreditation ex-post), after 4 years for Master's Degrees and 6 years for most Bachelor's Degrees (7-8 years for those carrying 300-330 ECTS respectively) and for Doctorate programmes.

#### **Ex-ante accreditation (verification)**

A positive evaluation by ACSUCYL is required before the Government of Castilla y León may approve a new official programme; this local requirement comes in addition to the national requirement that all new programmes need a positive ex-ante evaluation before they can be accredited, i.e. with validity throughout the Spanish territory and prior to entry on the Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT - *Registro de Universidades, Centros y Títulos*).

The relevant Knowledge Area Committee (Engineering and Architecture, Health Sciences, Sciences, Social and Legal Sciences, and Humanities) of the Degree Assessment Commission conducts the evaluation of the degree proposal submitted by the university. This is a desk-based review and the corresponding Commission issues a verification report regarding the fulfilment of the legal requirements and criteria, which is binding in nature, and includes, as applicable, recommendations to be analysed during the follow-up procedure.

#### **Review of changes in official programmes (modification)**

Minor changes to improve a degree programme can be introduced autonomously, while substantial modifications to an accredited degree that imply alterations to its structure, nature or objectives require approval by ACSUCYL. In this case the agency's corresponding Assessment Commission delivers a report regarding the coherence of the modification proposed. This is a desk-based review taking into account the criteria mentioned in the ex-ante accreditation.

#### **Follow-up (monitoring)**

The main responsibility for follow-up in between two accreditation rounds is assigned to the university, with ACSUCYL monitoring the compliance with the project laid down in the validated study plans. This procedure aims to provide universities with an external review of their practical implementation with a view to further enhance them and to prepare for the following stage (i.e. the ex-post accreditation procedure).

Each university programme submits a follow-up report to ACSUCYL annually. Based on those reports and other relevant information, the agency decides, in consultation with the higher education institutions, upon which programmes will receive a site visit in the frame of the follow-up procedure. A programme can be selected for a site visit in 3 ways:

- In case of a conditional verification or accreditation renewal report: at the end of the conditional accreditation period a follow-up site visit is mandatory;

- Universities can themselves propose programmes to receive a follow-up site visit. The report of such a visit does not have formal consequences, but may help programmes to prepare better for accreditation renewal;
- On the initiative of the agency. The agency may decide to organise a follow-up site visit in case the follow-up report or any other information indicate that there is a cause for concern. Such a site visit does not have formal consequences, but gives additional input for the accreditation renewal.

### **Renewal of accreditation**

The renewal of accreditation procedure consists mainly in guaranteeing that official study programmes are actually being delivered at the level of quality that was initially promised. All recognised degree courses must undergo accreditation within six years of validation (or within six years of a previous accreditation) in the case of Bachelor's and doctoral/PhD degrees, and four years in the case of Master's degrees.

The process for the renewal of accreditation for official degrees seeks to:

- Ensure that the implementation of the degree is being carried out in accordance with the verified report, using the appropriate resources, obtaining the anticipated outcomes and based on an internal quality assurance system.
- Ensure that the degree has been subject to appropriate follow-up and that the available quantitative and qualitative information has been used to gauge its progress and to generate the relevant proposals for improvement.
- Ensure the availability of pertinent and relevant public information for the various stakeholders involved in the higher education system.
- Provide recommendations and/or suggestions for improving the degree.

In applying the current legislation, ACSUCYL's Degree Assessment Committee issues a structured evaluation report on these standards, aimed at verifying whether the curriculum is being implemented in accordance with its initial project, by conducting an evaluation which will, in all instances, include a site visit to the university by external experts.

### Institutional level external reviews

#### **DOCENTIA**

Since 2005, the agency has been promoting the development of teaching performance assessment models. That year, ACSUCYL called on public universities in Castilla y León to design and apply pilot projects for the assessment of teaching quality. To further this action, in 2007 ACSUCYL and the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) signed a cooperation agreement to develop the DOCENTIA (Teaching Performance Assessment) programme within the area of the university system in Castilla y León.

The goal of the DOCENTIA programme is to support universities in the design and application of their own procedures to ensure quality amongst university teaching staff and to foster development and recognition of the programme. The programme has been designed such that, framed within university autonomy, it may guide universities while at the same time strengthening the increasingly important role which universities must play in teaching performance assessment and in the development of training plans for their teaching staff.

The DOCENTIA Programme comprises the following stages:

- Stage I: Publication of the call for participation in the DOCENTIA Programme.
- Stage II: Development and design by universities of models for evaluation of teaching.

- Stage III: External evaluation of the models in order to ensure compliance with the specifications and standards set out in DOCENTIA (desk-based review).
- Stage IV: Implementation of the evaluation procedures in the universities. Follow-up of implementation by the agency (desk-based review).
- Stage V: Certification of the Procedures for Evaluation of teaching (including a site visit to the institution).

### **ELENCHOS**

An important evolution in the higher education system in Castilla y León and in Spain generally is the introduction of the possibility of institutional accreditation for university centres (faculties and schools). The 2015 Royal Decree 420/2015, of 29 May, governing the creation, recognition, authorisation and accreditation of universities and university centres, created the possibility for university centres to obtain self-re-accrediting power for existing programmes on two conditions:

- At least half of the bachelor and half of the master programmes offered by the centre of faculty must already be accredited (ex-post).
- The centre or faculty must have been awarded certification for implementation of their internal quality assurance system (IQAS), issued by the quality assurance agency after having successfully completed an evaluation process in accordance with the protocol for the certification of the IQAS established by the General Conference for University Policy.

This is still a new assessment process and, in fact, its procedure and requirements were not established until 2018 (Resolution of March 7, 2018 of the General Secretariat of Universities of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports).

Centres that have obtained institutional accreditation will thus have accreditation of the official bachelor's and master's degrees they teach renewed for a period of five years. The establishment of new programmes will still require ex-ante accreditation by ACSUCYL.

In an effort to avoid duplicating the evaluation processes, ACSUCYL has brought into line the assessment criteria for the certification of implementation of the IQAS and institutional accreditation, coordinating the two processes in the ELENCHOS Programme. The ELENCHOS programme is being put into operation through a pilot call during the academic year 2018-2019.

### **Recognition of new university centres**

Royal Decree 420/2015 of 29 May 2015, in relation to the creation, recognition, authorisation and verification of universities and university centres, and regional Law Ley 3/2003 on the University in Castilla y León, require that new universities and university centres that plan to operate in the Castilla y León require a positive ex-ante report from ACSUCYL for their creation and recognition, which is a desk-based review that the agency prepares for the regional Government in order to recognise new universities and university centres. Also for the modification and suppression of university centres and affiliation of higher education centres to universities a review by ACSUCYL is necessary.

Similarly, ACSUCYL issues a report in the particular case of Doctoral Schools, under the "Decree 65/2013 of October 3, which regulates the creation, modification and suppression of Doctoral Schools in Universities of Castilla y León".

### **ACSUCYL'S FUNDING**

ACSUCYL's budget is included in the budget of the Regional Government. The budget needs to be approved annually, based on the activities which are performed by the agency. The final budget is defined ex-post and depends on the exact number of assessments performed.

**Table 2: Overview of the ACSUCYL budget**

YEAR	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total budget/area of activity	1 007 653.00	1 006 653.00	1 243 975.00	1 208 904.00	1 321 922.00
Assessment of Degrees	257 316.66	199 697.45	269 679.26	257 253.43	218 753.29
Assessment of Institutional Quality	63 159.75	25 632.16	18 930.62	31 165.98	53 955.00
Assessment of Research	166 272.19	74 784.71	103 788.96	139 097.28	156 019.12
Assessment of Teaching Staff	50 338.01	64 468.32	49 945.06	31 752.49	64 727.88
Provision of Equipment and Applications	34 591.26	12 565.96	8 074.54	20 553.14	13 291.63
TOTAL SPENDING ON ACTIVITIES	574 710.74	377 148.60	450 098.44	479 822.32	506 746.92
TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON STAFF	525 000.00	551 214.00	550 393.00	542 281.00	549.360.00

Self-Assessment Report ACSUCYL, p.33

The largest part of the revenue is provided by the Regional Government. In 2018, 1.234.962 euros were provided through public funding, while 86.710 euros came from assessment services and 250 euro from other sources.

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ACSUCYL 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

ACSUCYL's mission is to ensure the continuous improvement of quality in the higher education system and to provide information concerning the outcomes of its work that will prove useful to all stakeholders.

The agency pursues the following aims:

- a. To foster improvements in teaching, research and management of universities, research centres and higher education centres, favouring Castilla y León's competitiveness and economic development.
- b. To provide appropriate information concerning the higher education system to the public authorities, the productive sector as well as to society at large to help them with decision making in their respective areas of action.

These are the goals that drive ACSUCYL's actions and the Strategic Plan for the period 2014-2019. This plan sets out the agency's mission, establishes its strategic and operational objectives. Those objectives are reflected in the annual Action Plans which are approved by the Board of Directors and which include the following key commitments for 2019:

- Assessment programmes for quality assurance regulated under national and Castilla y León regional university legislation.
- Thematic studies and analyses geared towards improving the agency's work and providing universities, public authorities, and society with information about the higher education system.
- International activities to be undertaken by the agency within the context of the European networks of which it forms part.

ACSUCYL's mission, Strategic plans and Action Plans are available on its website in Spanish.

Since its establishment in 2001, ACSUCYL has carried out activities associated with external quality assurance at different levels. Since its registration in the European Quality Assurance Register, ACSUCYL has been able to extend its activities, implementing the full compulsory external quality assurance cycle at:

- a) programme level, including verification, modification, follow-up, and the renewal of accreditation of bachelor, master and PhD programmes.

- b) At institutional level ACSUCYL implements the DOCENTIA programme to help universities to develop internal quality assurance systems to guarantee the teaching quality of individual staff. Recently it has started the implementation of the Elenchos programme which accredits the educational offer of university centres (faculties and schools).
- c) Furthermore, the agency is responsible for the evaluation procedures that seek to create, recognise, modify or withdraw university centres.

Over the last few years, the agency has furthered the participation of representatives of higher education institutions (including vice-chancellors, coordinators and senior technical officers) in its governance and work, holding regular meetings in order to involve them in the design of external quality assurance processes. The regional Government is strongly involved in the Board of Directors. International academics and professionals are represented via the Advisory Board and students via the Student Board. Academics, including some international members, and professionals are represented in the Assessment commissions. Students and professionals are represented in the review panels.

### **Analysis**

As indicated under the separate sections of this report, the agency performs quality assurance activities regularly. Those are performed generally in line with Part 2 of the ESG, but the panel has also signalled several areas for improvement under the description of the specific standards.

The panel learned that a broad consensus exists among stakeholders about the agency's mission and the fact that the agency contributes both to the accountability and continuous improvement of higher education in Castilla y León.

A new strategic plan will commence in 2020. Preliminary discussions had begun about the content of this plan, but at the time of the site visit the agency hadn't yet developed a clear strategy for the coming five years. The panel appreciates that its evaluation will be taken into account in the development of this strategic plan, but did not consider it necessary to wait until its visit for the agency to start to actively prepare the new strategic plan.

The objectives per evaluation scheme are clearly communicated. Those objectives are often defined by law and further developed in handbooks for each evaluation scheme. All handbooks are publicly available and provided in time to the entities which will be subject to the reviews. Information sessions are held, wherever necessary.

The agency has invested in increased stakeholder involvement. The regional Government and universities are well-represented in the Governing Board. In the understanding of the panel, this body is mainly playing a supervisory role, approving decisions prepared by the Director, as well as a representative role towards the Government and the higher education institutions. Its role to be a sounding board for the agency's management could be strengthened. This role seems to be taken up more actively by the Advisory Board.

The labour market is represented in the governance (Advisory Board) and work of the agency (assessment commissions and review panels). Students have been involved in all education-related review panels. There is also a Student Board that acts as a consultative body with separate meetings coordinated by the Director of the agency. The panel values positively the creation of this Student Board, which includes representatives of all universities in Castilla y León. The Student Board's opinion is taken into account when revising and designing relevant review procedures as well as for drafting the annual or strategic plan. Nevertheless the panel considers that it would be valuable to involve student representatives also directly in decision making processes, e.g. by including them as

full members in the Governing and Advisory Boards where the long term strategy for the agency is developed, as well as in the Commissions where the assessment procedures are developed. As the main beneficiary of the higher education system, their voice is valuable in the governance of quality assurance. The panel discussed the issue of broader student representation with many stakeholders and understood that most of them find it relevant to have student representatives actively involved in the governance of the agency. The panel understood that one of the reasons not to have full student participation, yet, is the difficulty in finding enough student representatives. Although the panel appreciates this difficulty, it nonetheless advises the agency to exchange experiences with other Spanish and international agencies which manage to involve students at all levels of governance. Another reason that was signalled as why not to involve students is that the law does not include them in some bodies. As an intermediate solution, the panel suggests that they could be invited to attend as observers or that joint meetings with the Student Board could be considered so long as the law seems to limit student representation.

The panel noticed that the agency, when looking for independent experts, generally attracts experts from other Spanish regions. While this approach contributes to their independence, a stronger involvement of international experts in the governance and work of the agency is considered by the panel to be one of the agency's major areas for further improvement. Experts from other educational systems bring different perspectives on how higher education and its quality assurance can be organised. Those external perspectives can question elements which are considered to be 'normal' within a specific system and can help to think 'outside-the box'. The number of international experts currently involved in the governance and the work of the agency is very limited. Although involving international experts requires some additional resources and effort, the panel is convinced that there are many experts with sufficient understanding of Spanish and a willingness to travel to Spain who can help the agency to take this next step in its development.

#### **Panel recommendations**

- The panel recommends the agency to further increase the involvement of students in its Governing and Advisory Board.

#### **Suggestions for further improvement**

- The panel suggests the agency might involve more international perspectives in its governance and work to contribute different perspectives on how higher education and its quality assurance can be organised.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

#### **ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS**

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

Law 3/2003 governing universities in Castilla y León created the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL) as a public body governed by private law, with its own legal status. ACSUCYL is the external assessment body for the higher education system in Castilla y

Leon. Its structure and functions are established by regional Decree 15/2015 by which ACSUCYL internal regulation is approved.

Law 3/2003, of 28 March also establishes that:

- *“The aim of the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León is the assessment, accreditation and certification of quality in universities and higher education centres in Castilla y León” (art 35.1).*
- *“Furthermore, the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León may collaborate in activities related to assessment, accreditation and certification in the field of universities and higher education centres outside the region of Castilla y León within the context of the European Higher Education Area” (art 35.2).*

## **Analysis**

Based on the evidence provided by the agency, it is obvious that ACSUCYL has a clear legal basis. It is formally recognised by the regional Government as the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León.

The agency’s activities involve external programme review, more specifically verification, modification, follow-up and renewal of accreditation as well as the creation, recognition, authorisation and verification of universities and university centres and the recently launched Elenchos programme which leads to accreditation of the educational activities of university centres. All those activities are carried out for regulatory purposes.

Furthermore, the agency implements the DOCENTIA programme which has been developed together with other Spanish quality assurance agencies in order to certify the higher education institutions’ internal quality assurance systems for the quality of teaching.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## **ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE**

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

## **Evidence**

### Organisational independence

Law 3/2003 governing universities in Castilla y León created ACSUCYL as a public body governed by private law, with its own legal status, full capacity to act and its own assets to undertake its tasks. Said status, as is set out in the preamble to the law in question, is a reflection of the need for the agency to have its own legal system and functioning that is not connected to the institutions being evaluated, such that the tasks and duties it is charged with performing are carried out with the appropriate guarantees of independence, professionalism, and freedom to act that is characteristic of European assessment agencies.

The same regulations establish a clear separation in the agency's organic structure between what are its governing bodies (Board of Directors, Director) and its assessment bodies (assessment commissions), explicitly delimiting the tasks to be undertaken by each type of body and the incompatibility between being a member of an assessment commission and belonging to one of the agency's governing bodies.

The Governing Board is responsible for the governance of the agency in strategic and structural terms. The approval of its strategic and annual management plans, and the agency's preliminary budget plan are its main functions. Members of the Governing Board are appointed for four years by the regional minister responsible for universities. In the Governing Board the regional Government has a strong representation, including the chairperson, next to representatives of the universities in the region, 2 academics and one business person.

Next to the Governing Board, an Advisory Board has been created with members who are independent from both the regional Government and the universities in Castilla y León and a Student Board which is composed of student representatives from the 9 universities in Castilla y León. The Advisory Board and Student Board provide advice and support to the Governing Board and the Director.

All assessment-related decisions are taken by the assessment bodies, which are responsible for the development and implementation of the assessment procedures.

With regard to the actual organisation and management tasks, these are assigned to the Director of the agency, who is selected on the grounds of strictly technical criteria, in accordance with the principles of publicity, competition, merit, equality, and ability (art. 41.1. Law 3/2003). Likewise, the agency's staff are also selected in accordance with the same principles.

#### Operational independence

Members of the assessment commissions are appointed by the Director of ACSUCYL from amongst those experts who fit the profiles previously defined and which are detailed in the regulations governing the agency. Their composition is published in the Official Gazette of Castilla y León and on the agency's website together with their CVs.

The experts who advise the assessment commissions are also appointed by the Director of ACSUCYL from amongst those who meet the requirements set out in the corresponding regulations or assessment protocols.

All experts from universities or research centres who act as member of commissions and panels are affiliated to institutions outside Castilla y León (art. 16.1/2 of ACSUCYL'S regulations). Students and experts from the professional field who are member of commissions or panels may be from the Autonomous Community, but may not have any affiliation with the universities subject to evaluation.

In addition, prior to their being appointed, and as is established in the above-mentioned regulations, all experts are required to abide by the agency's Code of Ethics and sign a confidentiality and no-conflict-of-interest declaration.

As regards the design of the assessment procedures and methods, ACSUCYL enjoys autonomy, within the common reference frameworks established by the corresponding legislation and/or networks of European and Spanish agencies. It is the agency's assessment commissions who, in compliance with the functions set out in the applicable legislation, draw up and approve the protocols to be applied in the various assessment programmes.

#### Independence of formal outcomes

Final assessment decisions are the responsibility of the assessment commissions. This autonomy and independence is set out under "Law 3/2003 governing universities in Castilla y León", which assigns the task of issuing the assessment reports concerning the processes they are responsible for to the assessment bodies. In addition, the decisions adopted by these commissions conclude the administrative procedures.

## Analysis

The **organisational independence** is demonstrated by the aforementioned legislation and in the statutes of the agency. A layered approach has been developed with a Governing Board in which the Regional Government and the higher education institutions are well-represented. Those bodies have the role to define the strategy while the assessment commissions have the full responsibility to design procedures and implement them. This approach takes into account the regional and Spanish context, as well as the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines.

This separation of responsibilities between the Governing Board and assessment bodies ensures the independence of decision-making in relation to the quality assurance activities of the agency. The governing bodies have no powers in the assessment tasks and cannot influence ACSUCYL'S assessment, certification and accreditation reports, which are published by the assessment commissions independently.

Nevertheless, the agency is largely dependent on the regional Government for the appointment of its Governing Board and for the major part of its funding. Hiring additional staff is dependent on approval by the regional Government, even if the agency has the budget to extend its team. The budget itself needs to be adopted annually by the regional Government, based on the number of assessments to be performed by the agency and a fixed cost per assessment. Less than 7% (2018) of the agency's budget comes from non-government sources. This dependence for its budget and human resources limits the agency's freedom to operate. The panel encourages the agency to search for longer term financial security, as it has done by finding an agreement on the consolidation of its staffing over the coming years (see ESG 3.5). The panel is aware that several other Spanish agencies have signed multi-annual programme contracts with their regional Government.

The **operational independence** from external stakeholders is largely guaranteed through the legislation and the internal procedures of the agency. As indicated above, neither the Governing Board nor the Advisory Board are involved in the development of assessment procedures. The assessment commissions have full autonomy for defining the procedures, within the common reference frameworks established by the corresponding legislation and the networks of Spanish agencies.

The appointment of external experts is the responsibility of the Director. This decision is based on a proposal by the staff. Members of the commissions and panels are experts from universities or research centres located outside Castilla y León, as well as students and experts from the professional field who have no link with the universities subject to evaluation. They need to abide by the agency's Code of Ethics and sign a confidentiality and no-conflict-of-interest declaration. In the view of the panel this approach guarantees the independence from third parties.

Furthermore, the procedure to draft reports contributes to the independence of outcomes. Each panel prepares their review reports, which are finalised by the qualified assessment commission. In the case of degree assessments, the Knowledge Area Committee is consulted before the Degree Assessment Commission takes the final decision. The commissions and committees focus on consistency between review reports and the commissions are charged with finalising each review report. No other body is competent to make any changes in the reports of the evaluation committees. This guarantees the independence of the outcomes. Nevertheless, the outcomes of all reviews remain the responsibility of the agency. Formal decisions are often made by other bodies based on those reports.

**Panel 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.

#### The 2014 ENQA review recommendation on 2005 standard 2.8:

- The Agency should consider involving stakeholders in a discussion about what sort of system-wide analysis is needed at the Castilla y León level and is feasible under the Agency's current economic circumstances and whether more work in this area can be done on a national scale.

#### Evidence

Compiling thematic analysis reports is one of the functions which article 36 of "Law 3/2003, of 28 March governing universities in Castilla y León", assigns to ACSUCYL, with regard to both analysing the situation of higher education in Castilla y León, so as to provide information thereon to public authorities and universities themselves, as well as studies aimed at improving and innovating the assessment and certification models, fostering follow-up of quality standards in the European and international framework. The same law establishes the channels to circulate these reports and studies to the Academic Committee of the Castilla y León University Council, which all the universities in Castilla y León are members of.

The following reports corresponding to an analysis of the information from ACSUCYL's activities are currently available through the agency's website ([www.acsucyl.es](http://www.acsucyl.es)) in the specific section that deals with thematic analyses:

- A report on the mapping of official degrees in the higher education system in Castilla y León: analysis of its progress and future prospects (January 2019).
- An analysis of the results of the assessment process of official university Bachelor's and master's degrees at universities in Castilla y León, carried out within the framework of the general procedure for the renewal of initial accreditation (period 2013-2018).
- An analysis of the outcomes of assessing institutes. A report on study for improving the "map" of university research institutes in the context of the research structures in the higher education system in Castilla y León.
- An analysis of the results of curricula assessment for their verification. A report on the proposals for new official university degrees in the "map of degrees" in Castilla y León (2016-2017 academic year).
- A report on the Status of the External Quality Review of Spanish Universities which has been prepared together with the other Spanish agencies under the coordination of the national quality assurance agency Aneca (2017).

In addition to thematic analysis reports, ACSUCYL compiles other studies which are not considered to be thematic analysis reports of its external quality assurance activities, but nonetheless provide useful information for stakeholders vis-à-vis management and decision making.

#### Analysis

Since 2015, and subsequent to the approval and review of the ESG, the agency has oriented its efforts more towards thematic analyses as defined in the revised European standards. Although indicators and reports on its actions and the outcomes to emerge from its activities were already being prepared, an analysis or orientation towards reflection and improvement in quality policies in

the regional, national or international context was not always included in these reports. This weakness was also pointed out in ENQA's 2014 external review report.

The agency refers in the self-assessment report to a detailed overview of reports it publishes regularly on its activities and procedures. The panel has reviewed those reports to evaluate whether they are within the scope of ESG 2015. All those reports provide relevant information and insights on the work of the agency. The work done on the development of a Degree Map for Castilla y León was welcomed by the higher education institutions and regional Government. Several institutions suggested to renew this analysis taking into account recent developments in higher education and beyond. In the opinion of the panel, the agency has made clear progress in this area in recent years. In the thematic analysis reports, relevant information is presented and some level of analysis is provided, but the review panel is of the opinion that there is room for further improvement, by focussing on more extensive and deeper analysis of the findings of the external reviews performed by ACSUCYL. As indicated in the ESG, a thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty. By increasing the focus on those elements, the agency may contribute even more to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.

The review panel clearly values the efforts made by the ACSUCYL staff and the members of its Advisory Board in publishing thematic analysis. While the panel values the efforts of the members of the Advisory Board to prepare thematic analysis reports, the review panel considers that it may be difficult to take a next step towards more structural and deeper analysis, unless the agency can expand its human resources for the preparation of thematic analyses, or that it builds other capacity to perform the necessary research and analysis. The agency might wish to consider commissioning (part of) this research to external experts or researchers.

The agency also indicated that disseminating the results beyond the website is another area for improvement in which work will be done shortly. Here, the idea is to present the different reports as well as creating working groups that will allow for the dissemination as well as the analysis and discussion of the results obtained. In this regard, it is important to involve all stakeholders in the discussion about what sort of thematic analysis is needed within Castilla y León. It would be relevant to involve society at large in this discussion and not limit it to the regional Government and higher education institutions.

In order to achieve full compliance with this standard, the panel recommends the agency to structurally develop reports that describe and analyse the general findings of the agency's individual external quality assurance activities in order to inform (potential) students, the regional Government and society at large. Those results can also serve for quality improvement within programmes, higher education institutions and at system level. A more strategic approach to thematic analysis should ensure that this becomes a transversal process within the whole agency.

#### **Panel recommendations**

- The panel recommends the agency to structurally develop reports that describe and analyse the general findings of the agency's individual review processes quality assurance activities in order to inform (potential) students, the regional Government and society at large.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

#### The 2014 ENQA review recommendation on 2005 standard 3.4:

- ACSUCYL should carefully consider the coherence between the financial resources available and the fitness for purpose of the current ex-post programme accreditation scheme.
- ACSUCYL should consider a shift to institutional or audit reviews at the EQA system level (as also mentioned under ESG (2005) 2.4).

#### Evidence

Over 93 percent of ACSUCYL's budget is provided directly by the regional Government. The agency's budget is included in the budget of the regional Government. After substantial budget cuts during the economic crisis, an increase can be seen in the agency's spending since 2015, coupled with a saving in the cost of degree assessment processes. One of the weaknesses highlighted in the previous review was the lack of resources available to undertake the mandatory activities, particularly in the process for renewal of accreditation of official degrees, an aspect which has been addressed by devoting more resources to the scheduled assessments, combined with a reduction in the cost of the process (economies of scale and improved organisation of assessment dates), which has enabled the planned activities to be carried out.

ACSUCYL has a small approved staff complement of 12 people (ten senior technical officers and two administrative staff). The cutbacks sparked by the financial crisis led to three layoffs in 2012, as a result of which currently only nine posts are covered (eight senior technical officers and one administrative assistant), in addition to the Director. In 2018, a staff consolidation development plan was approved by the Board of Directors which will commence in 2019, and which envisages filling the current vacancies over the coming five years.

ACSUCYL also has its own infrastructure (such as offices and meeting rooms) and management tools that facilitate the assessment processes. All of the assessment programmes are currently carried out with the support of customised computer applications that aid both the handling of all the documents and evidence being dealt with as well as the assessment tasks performed by the experts.

#### Analysis

Overall, ACSUCYL remains largely dependent on Government funding. As indicated in the commentary under ESG 3.3 (Independence), the budget is discussed and approved annually. This not only creates uncertainty, but also a large dependence on the regional Government. For example, when the Government has to work under an extended budget, only staff expenses and expenses derived from ordinary operations can be executed. This has a clear impact on the activity of the agency, which cannot address its strategic priorities when they involve new expenditure.

Positive is that the agency has managed to increase its budget over the past few years and that the Government has committed to allowing the agency to hire 3 additional staff, bringing the team back to the pre-crisis size.

Although the budget is complemented with some income from international projects and fees for some evaluations, the agency has not, as yet, developed a strategy to diversify its income streams. Within the current context, this is acceptable. Nevertheless, the panel advises the agency to seek

longer term security for its funding from Government (as discussed previously under ESG 3.3 (Independence) and to discuss whether more diversified income streams may be useful to increase the independence of the agency.

Based on its meetings with different stakeholders, the panel is convinced that the agency has sufficient resources, both human and financial, to carry out its assessment procedures. Notwithstanding, several stakeholders signalled that the agency is only able to fulfil its duties thanks to the very efficient organisation and its long-serving and well-qualified team. The panel commends the team for the work it has carried out over the past years. The staff also indicated that they get sufficient opportunities for additional training and learning. Nevertheless, the current team size remains fragile and it is clear that the agency needs the promised additional staff to continue its work and fully implement the Elenchos programme.

As discussed under ESG 3.4 (Thematic analysis), the agency has achieved to develop a basic level of thematic analysis with its current capacity. Nevertheless, dedicated staff and resources will be necessary if the agency wants to fully exploit the potential and to better unlock the results of the individual review procedures. The panel believes that this should be the first priority when extending the team.

**Panel commendations**

- The panel commends the agency for the efficient and effective use of the resources the Government provides.

**Panel recommendations**

- The panel recommends that the agency seeks an agreement with the Regional Government which provides security on budgets through multi-annual funding and to discuss whether more diversified income streams may be useful to increase the independence of the agency.
- The panel recommends that the agency secures sufficient resources to extend its work on thematic analysis to enable it to implement the panel’s recommendations mentioned under ESG 3.4.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

**ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

Standard:  Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.
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**The 2014 ENQA review recommendation on 2005 standard 3.8:**

- ACSUCYL should pursue its efforts to strengthen student involvement. Specifically, the specific role of the newly created Student Committee should be clarified, as well as their actual capacity to provide useful feedback for the Agency.

**Evidence**

ACSUCYL’s Quality Policy and Quality Handbook are published on the agency’s website.

ACSUCYL has its own mechanisms to ensure the quality and integrity of all the activities it carries out. In 2006, it designed its own internal quality assurance system in accordance with ISO 9001, based on the Plan-Do-Check-Act approach.

In 2018, the agency adapted its IQAS to the latest version of ISO 9001:2015, which has meant redesigning the whole system so that it responds to current standards. This adaptation has enabled a more detailed analysis of its functioning. As a new feature, a risk analysis is now included, which is reviewed annually.

In order to ensure the system works correctly, the agency has designed an integrated dashboard that provides up-to-the-minute information on how well the processes are being carried out. The system also serves, together with the information from the meta-evaluation stage, as a basis for the analyses carried out each six months by the Quality Committee of how well the system is functioning.

In order to receive feedback from stakeholders (including higher education institutions, experts and staff), the agency implements a user and expert analysis and satisfaction process. It establishes that once all the quality assurance processes have concluded, a survey is conducted amongst the experts in order to gauge their level of satisfaction with the process they have been involved in, and to pinpoint weaknesses and proposals for improvement. Information is also gathered from the higher education institutions through regular meetings. Added to this is other information gathered from meetings held by the agency's advisory bodies (Advisory Board, Student Board), by its Board of Directors, staff meetings and information received through suggestions and complaints, audit reports on the system and deviations therein. In order to analyse the information obtained and to draw conclusions for continuous improvement, ACSUCYL has various bodies.

Depending on the nature of the feedback received, this is processed by specific bodies:

- Information received which affects the agency's internal running and organisation is analysed by the Quality Committee, which holds meetings each six months in order to adopt whatever proposals for improvement are deemed necessary.
- Information related to new proposals for action is analysed by the Advisory Board and the Student Board.
- Information related to assessment procedures is examined by ACSUCYL's assessment commissions which, once the processes have concluded, conduct a meta-evaluation so as to include, where required, the necessary improvements or adjustments in the application of the standards, when conducting the processes or in the reference documents.

The Code of Ethics is signed by all staff and experts the agency works with. Experts are selected and appointed through mechanisms which should safeguard ethical behaviour and professionalism in their work. These principles are directly linked to experts' obligation to agree to act with integrity and impartiality in the activities they are involved in. No complaints have been received related to behaviour which is out of line with the Code of Ethics. The members of the commissions and panels are evaluated annually by the chairperson and secretary. Professional conduct is one of the elements in this evaluation.

The agency does not sub-contract any ESG-related activities.

## **Analysis**

ACSUCYL clearly defines processes and procedures for all its activities. It also has structures in place for assuring and enhancing the correct implementation of its procedures. All review procedures are evaluated regularly by involving all stakeholders, leading to so-called meta-evaluations. Those evaluations lead to continuous improvement of the assessment procedures performed by the

agency. Although the agency indicates that it has reviewed all its procedures in order to align them with the 2015 version of the ESG, the review panel sees room for improvement in this area (see ESG 2.1). Generally, the panel has noticed a strong focus on the correct implementation of procedures and on stakeholder satisfaction. As the smooth running of procedures is clearly guaranteed, it would be useful to further shift the focus of the internal quality assurance activities towards the evaluation of the impact of the agency's work on the quality of higher education in Castilla y León.

Similarly, the review panel considers ACSUCYL's Self-Assessment Report for the ENQA review to be informative but according to the panels observations it could have been more self-critical. For example, the agency's own analysis on the compliance of the reviews of Research Institutes with the ESG Part 1 did not signal its potential non-compliance. Thanks to the open and transparent discussions with all stakeholders during the site visit, the panel came to the conclusion that those activities did not comply with the ESG Part 1, and as such, should not have been considered in scope for the current evaluation.

In order to show its focus on continuous improvement, ACSUCYL listed the recommendations of the previous ENQA review and indicated how those have been implemented. Clearly, efforts have been made in order to implement those recommendations, although the panel signals in this report that some elements which could be improved further.

No specific policies are in place to guard against intolerance or discrimination, except for the efforts to involve women in all assessment procedures. Although those efforts lead to female representation, the panel recommends to raise the efforts to guarantee a better gender balance in ACSUCYL's governance and advisory bodies, as well as in the agency's assessment panels and commissions.

#### **Panel recommendation**

- The panel recommends the agency to complement the process-oriented approach of internal quality assurance with a more self-critical attitude and further strengthen the focus on the impact of its work on the quality of higher education in Castilla y León.

#### **Panel suggestion for improvement**

- The panel suggests that the agency raises its efforts to guarantee a gender balance in its governance and advisory bodies.

#### **Panel 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**

ACSUCYL's Quality Policy, approved by its Board of Directors, makes reference to the agency's commitment to *"ensuring compliance of the international standards established for quality assurance agencies and periodically submitting the Agency's processes and activities to external review in order to accredit said compliance."*

As a result, the agency is committed to undergoing periodic review each five years, as set out in the ESG, through an external review conducted by ENQA. The first of these reviews took place in 2009, the second in 2014, both applying the 2005 edition of the ESG. In 2019, the third external review of ACSUCYL by ENQA is taking place, the first to be conducted in accordance with the updated 2015 version of ESG.

Additionally, Spanish legislation establishes that, as a requirement for the conduct of certain activities such as the ex-ante accreditation of study programmes or institutional accreditation, quality assurance agencies “should be registered under EQAR after successfully passing an external evaluation in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”.

### **Analysis**

The regional legislation makes explicit reference to the compliance with international standards and periodical external review. ACSUCYL has undergone three ENQA coordinated reviews and commits to submit itself to ENQA reviews every five year in the future.

As indicated, Spanish regulation requires registration under EQAR as a prerequisite to perform ex-ante and ex-post accreditation, as well as institutional accreditation independently as a regional agency. As ACSUCYL wants to continue those activities, it is even more motivated to undergo a cyclical review at least every five years so as to renew its ENQA membership and EQAR listing by demonstrating compliance with the ESG and taking the required steps to follow up on any recommendations provided.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## **ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### **ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

### **Evidence**

The activities of ACSUCYL are subject to comprehensive national and regional regulation. The legal framework assigns a substantial number of tasks to the agency, which range from the implementation of programme accreditation to institutional reviews. In the introductory part of this report, the different activities have been described in more detail.

ACSUCYL has worked towards the goal that its external quality assurance procedures are comprehensively designed and carried out taking into account the effectiveness of the internal processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines. According to the agency, all the activities related to programme evaluation, as well as the Elenchos programme and the evaluation of university centres, consider the relevant standards of Part 1 of the ESG. The DOCENTIA programme does not focus on student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4).

Since 2017 the agency specifically includes in the assessment protocols the direct link of ESG Part 1 and the standards that ACSUCYL applies when conducting the assessment. The table below is a

summary of ACSUCYL's self-assessment report indicating the alignment of the agency's evaluation schemes with the ESG Part 1.

**Table 3: Self-assessment of the compliance with ESG Part 1**

	Verification and modification Ba & Ma	Verification and modification PhD	Follow-up and renewal of accreditation Ba & Ma	Follow-up and renewal of accreditation PhD	DOCENTIA	ELENCHOS	University centres
<i>1.1 Policy for quality assurance</i>	9*	8	2.2, 2.3	3	1	1	9
<i>1.2 Design and approval of programmes</i>	1, 2, 3, 10	1, 2	1.1	2	2	2	1, 2, 3, 10
<i>1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</i>	5, 8	4, 5	1.2	1, 6	2	3	5, 8
<i>1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</i>	4	3	1.2	1	NA	3	4
<i>1.5 Teaching staff</i>	6	6	3.1	4	1, 2, 3	4	6
<i>1.6 Learning resources and student support</i>	7	7	3.2	5	2	5	7
<i>1.7 Information management</i>	8, 9	8	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5	3, 7	2	6	8, 9
<i>1.8 Public information</i>	4, 8	8	2.1	2	1, 2	8	4, 8
<i>1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</i>	8, 9	8	2.2	3	2	7	8, 9
<i>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</i>							

\*Numbers in the table refer to the relevant ACSUCYL standard

## Analysis

The panel has assessed the consistency of the evaluation procedures with ESG Part 1 based on the tables provided by the agency, as summarised above, and on the evaluation criteria as described in the evaluation handbooks. Overall the analysis of the review panel confirms the references as outlined in Table 3. However, in some cases the review panel found that some elements of the ESG are not fully reflected in the evaluation criteria which are used by the agency. In the following paragraphs the analysis of the compliance with ESG Part 1 is discussed in detail.

The assessments for the creation, suppression and affiliation of university centres use the same criteria as the ones used for the verification of programmes (ex-ante evaluation). Therefore, if not mentioned explicitly, the compliance with the ESG Part 1 of those procedures is the same as the compliance of the verification of programmes procedure.

### **1.1 Policy for quality assurance**

ACSUCYL requires that universities implement comprehensive quality assurance policies. This item is considered in all evaluation programmes, including the study programme evaluation procedures (verification, modification, follow-up and accreditation renewal), the evaluation at the level of university centres (Elenchos for teaching and the certification of centres) and the evaluation of teaching staff assessments at the level of the whole university (DOCENTIA). The assessment for the creation, suppression and affiliation of university centres evaluates the existence of an internal quality assurance system.

Generally, the procedures focus on stakeholder satisfaction and processes for internal quality assurance. The strategic perspective as to whether the activities form part of the university's strategic management receives less attention in procedures at programme level. In the Elenchos programme this receives more explicit attention.

### **1.2 Design and approval of programmes**

In Castilla y León, official study programmes require an external assessment before they may be offered (verification). This procedure focusses on the design of programmes. Whenever substantial changes are made in the design of programmes, an external evaluation (modification procedure) is required. The follow-up and accreditation renewal procedures focus more on implementation, rather than on the design of programmes. The Elenchos programme focuses on the evaluation of the internal quality assurance system and how this ensures the quality of the design of the programmes. As the DOCENTIA programme is oriented primarily at the evaluation of the teaching quality of staff, it refers less explicitly to the design and approval of programmes as a whole. The assessment for the creation, suppression and affiliation of university centres evaluates the educational offering, as well as the design and approval of the individual educational programmes.

### **1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment**

The most significant change in Part 1 of the 2015 ESG is the focus on student-centred learning, teaching and assessment. This standard focuses on how students are encouraged to take an active role in creating their learning process. The assessment of students should reflect this.

The new Elenchos programme refers explicitly to active cooperation of students in their teaching/learning process. In the case of DOCENTIA, it is part of the planning of teaching activities and their expected outcomes.

In the evaluation schemes at programme level, references are made to learning outcomes and the involvement of students in the decision making of their programme. While those elements offer the opportunity to discuss aspects of student-centred learning, this depends on the panels' level of understanding of this concept. In the ex-ante evaluation of Bachelor's and Master's degrees, these aspects are reviewed as part of the criteria dealing with the planning of teaching activities and their expected outcomes. In the ex-ante evaluation of Doctoral programmes, they are reviewed when assessing the educational activities, the programme organisation and achievement of the expected learning outcomes. In the follow-up and accreditation renewal procedures, they are part of the review of delivery and performance indicators, and achievement of learning outcomes (respectively).

Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment requires at least that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process and that the assessment of students reflects this approach. In the view of the panel there is a need to build a common understanding on the particular meaning of student-centred learning within the universities of Castilla y León and consequently to train all commission and panel members to create better

awareness of the concept. In order to guarantee that all procedures fully take into account a student-centred learning, teaching and assessment approach, student-centred learning should be integrated explicitly in all the agency's evaluation procedures.

#### **1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification**

Student admission, progression, recognition and certification is reviewed as part of the evaluation criteria at programme level related to the assessment of the entrance profile of applicants, access procedures and academic regulations applicable to the programme. In the verification programme, it is part of the review of the admission of students for Bachelor's and Master's degrees, while for Doctoral degrees it is included in the criterion dealing with student access and admission. It is also a component of the assessment renewal, which contains specific guidelines regarding entrance profile and academic regulations.

With regard to Elenchos, criteria on admission are explicitly mentioned in the evaluation framework, while progression and recognition are considered under a criterion related to academic rules. The student life cycle does not fall within the scope of the DOCENTIA programme.

#### **1.5 Teaching staff**

ACSUCYL performs several specific activities related to quality assurance of teaching staff. It is in charge of the evaluation of individual staff in different stages of their career. These activities fall outside the scope of this review but do contribute to the assessment of quality of individual staff.

Within the scope of this review, the quality aspects referring to the available teaching staff are reviewed as part of the standard dealing with academic staff or human resources in the verification, modification, follow-up and accreditation renewal procedures. In those evaluation schemes no specific attention is paid to the processes for the recruitment of staff.

In the Elenchos programme the staff policy is assessed, as well as how the centre guarantees and enhances the quality of its academic staff. Regarding DOCENTIA, quality assurance of the teaching activity is the main focus of the procedure.

#### **1.6 Learning resources and student support**

The agency evaluates learning resources and student support in the programme reviews, including verification, modification, follow-up and accreditation renewal. Criteria are related to supporting staff and services and to learning resources available for students.

In the Elenchos programme, procedures related to learning resources and student support systems are assessed explicitly. In the DOCENTIA programme, this element is only assessed indirectly as part of the guidelines dealing with methodology.

#### **1.7 Information management**

In all evaluations of study programmes (verification, modification, follow-up and accreditation renewal) this standard is reviewed as part of the internal quality assurance system. To have a regular and effective system of collecting and analysing relevant information and outcomes is an explicit evaluation criterion. In the Elenchos programme information management is reviewed when assessing how the centre analyses its outcomes, and in the DOCENTIA procedure it is part of the quality review of outcomes. In the procedure for the creation, suppression and affiliation of university centres information management is tackled under legal procedures and internal quality assurance.

## **1.8 Public information**

Public information plays a crucial role in the external quality assurance processes in Spain. All programme evaluation schemes ensure that institutions publish information on their programmes. The procedures for verification and modifications evaluate this when looking into student access and admission and expected outcomes, and the procedures for follow-up and accreditation renewal include a standard about “Public Information” (Bachelor’s and Master’s) and “Information and Transparency” (PhD programmes). The Elenchos programme reviews how the centres guarantee the publication and accessibility of information on its study programmes under the relevant Public Information standard. The DOCENTIA programme does not review public information explicitly.

## **1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes**

The external quality assurance system in the Castilla y León has a strong focus on the development of internal quality assurance procedures. All stakeholders acknowledge the positive impact of those procedures on the development of the quality assurance of higher education.

The procedures for verification and modification address the on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes when reviewing the expected outcomes and the quality assurance system (for Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees) or when assessing the programme review, improvement and outcomes of the programme (for Doctoral programmes). During the follow-up stage and accreditation renewal, it is addressed as part of the evaluation of the internal quality assurance system.

Furthermore, the on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards is a crucial element in the Elenchos programme in its evaluation of the internal quality assurance system of the centre. The DOCENTIA programme does not, in itself, evaluate the review of programmes, but focusses on the internal quality assurance processes to guarantee the quality of individual teaching staff and thus contributes to the overall monitoring of the teaching activities within higher education institutions.

## **1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance**

As indicated previously, Spanish law requires that programmes leading to an official university degree be subjected to an external evaluation process on a cyclical basis. The cycle includes verification, monitoring/follow-up and accreditation renewal. After the verification procedure, accreditation renewal is required after four (for Master’s degrees) or six years (for Bachelor’s degrees and PhD degrees). In the meantime, each higher education institution is required to implement follow-up procedures and to report on its progress to the agency. Wherever the agency deems it necessary, it may organise site visits to check those follow-up reports. This is always done in the case of conditional verification/accreditation reports, but also based on the request of universities or on the initiative of the agency. In the case where a university wants to make substantial changes to programmes, it needs to submit a modification request which is assessed by the agency.

University centres which have had the accreditation of at least half of their Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees renewed and which have their internal quality assurance system certified, can be accredited for their education activities. In this case, follow-up and accreditation renewal still need to be developed, but there is a clear ambition to develop this into a cyclical process. For the DOCENTIA programme, certification must be renewed every five years.

## Summary

The panel is confident that the broad range of ACSUCYL's external quality assurance activities take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes in the universities under review as described in Part 1 of the ESG. Based on its meetings with stakeholders, it is clear to the panel that the agency's work has contributed to the development of internal quality assurance procedures in line with the ESG in the higher education system in Castilla y León.

The main area for improvement lies in the integration of the concept of student-centred learning, teaching and assessment in the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions in Castilla y León. While this approach is largely integrated in the Elenchos programme, it is not mentioned in the other evaluation schemes that ACSUCYL performs. Some elements of the concept are mentioned and offer panels the opportunity to discuss student-centred learning, but this does not offer any guarantees that all programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process and that the assessment of students reflects this approach. In order to guarantee that ESG 1.3 is fully implemented, there is a need to build a common understanding on the particular meaning of student-centred learning, teaching and assessment within Castilla y León, as well as the impact of this approach on the design of internal quality assurance systems.

### Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends the agency to further integrate the concept of student-centred learning, teaching and assessment as a core element in all its procedures (ESG 1.3).

### Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

### The 2014 ENQA review recommendation on 2005 standards 2.2 and 2.4:

- ACSUCYL should consider how universities in Castilla y León could be more actively involved in the design and development of new quality assurance processes.
- The Agency should remain vigilant to ensure that ex-post degree programme accreditations are carried out in accordance with established European best practices regarding the time spent per programme, the size and profile of the expert team, etc, so as to ensure an appropriate level of analysis.
- The Agency should be proactive in initiating a debate at the regional and national level in order to consider the global fitness for purpose of the Spanish EQA system as well as the opportunity of a shift to institutional or audit reviews.

### Evidence

The national Government establishes the general framework for external quality assurance in Spain. For ex-ante evaluation the criteria are established in a royal decree, while for other procedures the Government only defines the general framework of the procedure and not the specific evaluation

criteria. Regulatory frameworks are based on proposals developed by the Spanish quality assurance agencies that are members of EQAR. ACSUCYL is, for example, a member of two working groups created by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, to improve the regulation of official university courses.

REACU, the Spanish network of quality assurance agencies, develops general assessment procedures based on the law that serve as a reference framework for external quality assurance agencies operating in Spain. ACSUCYL plays an active role within REACU. Based on the reference frameworks developed by REACU, each agency designs its own procedures to be applied in its region.

ACSUCYL'S involvement in the ENQA working group on quality assurance in e-learning has also led to the creation, at a national level, of a reference framework that is used by all the agencies working in Spain to evaluate online programmes. This document was launched in May 2018, and stakeholders involved in ACSUCYL'S activities from all over Spain were invited to the presentation.

In order to make sure that the regional Government also designs its education policy and processes in a way that they are fit for purpose, the Director of the agency holds regular meetings with the regional Directorate General for universities and research.

Within the agency, the assessment commissions (cf. p.11) approve the assessment protocols applied to each specific programme. These commissions, drawing on the technical support of agency staff, examine all the proposals received from the various agents, and define and review the specific processes to be applied.

The agency also involves other stakeholders in the design and continuous improvement of the procedures it implements. Universities in Castilla y León take part through regular meetings organised by ACSUCYL at least twice a year. The aim of these meetings is to hear the needs and suggestions concerning the programmes to be introduced or which have been introduced, both in terms of new designs as well as in improvements in existing programmes.

ACSUCYL's Advisory Board and its Student Board can be asked to provide feedback on the agency's processes through periodic meetings. Recently, their advice was sought on the assessment process for the renewal of accreditation of official university bachelor's and master's degrees. Following consideration, certain proposals have been put forward that have helped to improve organisation and management for both the universities and the agency alike. Prominent in this regard is the "Analysis of the development of degree assessment processes" published in 2016, which established the coordinated planning of all the assessment processes that affect official university degrees which, as a proposal from the agency, was approved by the Academic Committee of the Castilla y Leon University Council.

In certain cases of programmes that are being implemented for the first time (such as the ELENCHOS programme) or programmes for which fresh impetus is being sought (such as the DOCENTIA programme), the agency creates working groups in which universities and members of the agency's assessment commissions take part. The aim is to raise greater awareness amongst universities vis-à-vis the ESG and to endow the assessments with greater efficacy, while at the same time reducing the red tape involved in the processes.

At the end of each evaluation procedure, the agency carries out a so-called meta-evaluation, in which it involves the technical units for quality at all of the universities as well as experts taking part in the assessment processes (which includes students, academics and professionals).

All agreed procedures and criteria for evaluation are published on the agency's webpage. The purpose and objectives are defined before the procedures are elaborated. The purpose of each procedure is also set out in the first section of each handbook.

## **Analysis**

The panel has learnt that ACSUCYL performs a broad range of quality assurance procedures in a highly regulated context. Often the purpose and the objectives of those procedures are defined externally. All stakeholders commend the efforts of the agency to design the procedures as efficiently as possible. Whatever results from one procedure can be used as an input for other procedures so as to avoid duplication of effort. Still, the panel believes that the number of mandatory processes and the level of detail in the legislation are high. The panel, therefore, sees room for further efficiency gains in the external quality assurance system in Castilla y León.

The panel positively values ACSUCYL's pro-activity in seeking to influence the design and fitness for purpose of future quality assurance processes, through its involvement in national working groups and within REACU. Also the initiative it has taken to develop a specific assessment framework for online education, which is shared with other agencies is an example of this pro-active approach. The panel also encourages the agency to continue to cooperate closely with the other Spanish agencies to develop and improve procedures. Cooperation can prevent duplication of the same work and allow the sharing of experience and expertise.

The panel welcomes the introduction of the Elenchos programme which should increase the autonomy of universities, while maintaining accountability towards external stakeholders. This programme has not been established until 2018 and it is still in an early stage of its implementation. So it is difficult, as yet, to assess its impact on the fitness for purpose of the system. While the process should clearly reduce the workload related to the external assessment process, the impact of strengthened internal quality assurance processes should also be taken into account in the evaluation of the workload related to quality assurance processes.

Wherever relevant, the agency invests in the extensive preparation of new procedures. The panel learned that the design of the external quality assurance procedures is the responsibility of the Assessment Commissions, which are at the same time responsible for the implementation of the review procedures. As students are not members of the Assessment Commissions, their input may be gathered by asking the Student Board for advice on the procedures which are developed by the Commissions. In the opinion of the panel, it would be useful to involve students directly in those body's which have the responsibility to design new procedures as they are the main beneficiary of those procedures. While the agency aims to be innovative in the way it designs procedures fit for purpose, involving several international experts from different educational traditions in the body which is responsible for designing the procedures would allow to integrate more diverse inputs and may lead to procedures which are better fit for purpose.

Once the procedures are implemented, the agency also invests in the continuous improvement of each evaluation scheme. The practice of meta-evaluation of evaluation procedures contributes to the continuous improvement of the work of the agency. The panel values the involvement of the universities in Castilla y León in the design and development of new quality assurance processes.

As indicated above, the agency has streamlined the timing of all assessment procedure. This approach has increased the efficiency of the work of the agency. Notwithstanding, the panel received feedback that the fixed dates for every process do not always allow a new programme to be established as fast as more recently established universities would want it to.

Overall, the panel noticed that within the whole external quality assurance system, there is a strong focus on the development of procedures and on quantitative indicators. This is found both in evaluation frameworks and in assessment reports. While these elements are crucial in the development of a real quality culture, the agency may wish to continue to seek for a better balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches. The panel believes that a better balance may help to reduce the administrative burden of evaluation schemes and increase the added value of external quality assurance for the higher education system.

Finally, as a consequence of the implementation of the Elenchos programme, the panel has noticed that there are several external quality assurance processes at centre level. While the Elenchos programme is designed to focus mainly on education, the procedure for the creation, recognition, modification, suppression or affiliation of university centres has a broader scope, but also evaluates - with slightly different standards – education activities. Furthermore, the accreditation of research institutes, which focusses mainly on research, also makes some links to PhD programmes. The agency indicated that the choice of performing those evaluations via separate procedures is established in the regulations of the Autonomous Region. The panel encourages the agency, together with the Regional Government to reflect on whether the combination of those processes at centre/institute level continues to be the optimal framework, and whether further streamlining of the different processes might be useful.

#### **Panel commendations**

- The panel commends the agency for its pro-activity in seeking to influence the design of future quality assurance processes.

#### **Panel recommendations**

- The panel recommends the agency to search for a better balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches in its quality assurance procedures in order to further increase the fitness for purpose of the external quality assurance system as a whole.
- The panel recommends involving students more in the development of quality assurance processes.
- The panel encourages the agency, together with the Regional Government to reflect on whether the combination of those processes at centre/institute level continues to be the optimal framework, and whether further streamlining of the different processes might be useful.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

#### **ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES**

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

## Evidence

For each evaluation scheme, the steps in the process are described in detail in a handbook which is published on the agency's website. Additionally, internal procedures are developed in order to guarantee the professional, consistent and transparent implementation of those procedures.

Most procedures, as shown in Table 4, include a self-evaluation stage, a review by an assessment panel, and a report providing guidance for the actions to be taken by the institution. All reports are published on the agency's website.

**Table 4: Implementing process per procedure**

	Self-assessment	Site visit	Report	Follow-up
Verification	X		X	Follow-up
Follow-up	X	(X)	X	Accreditation renewal
Modification	X		X	Follow-up
Accreditation renewal	X	X	X	Follow-up
Elenchos certification implementation IQAS	X		X	Tbc
Elenchos Institutional accreditation	X	X	X	Tbc
DOCENTIA design/follow-up	X		X	DOCENTIA follow-up/certification
DOCENTIA certification	X	X	X	DOCENTIA certification renewal
University Centres Creation/recognition/modification/suppression/affiliation	X		X	

All procedures are based on information provided by the university.

The external quality assurance system as a whole has a cyclical approach, including follow-up of previous assessments. In the case of procedures comprising an implementation stage, the evaluation includes a site visit during which stakeholders are interviewed. The agency does not see value in site visits for ex-ante procedures.

At programme level, the agency is in charge of the full cycle of external evaluation. Every new programme needs to go through a desk-based verification process before it is implemented. An annual follow-up report needs to be filed by the institution. In these reports they have to provide information about how they are dealing with the recommendations from previous reviews. Based on the original report, the follow-up report, other information gathered by the agency or a request by the institution, ACSUCYL decides whether a follow-up visit is needed. Whenever this is the case, the agency performs a follow-up assessment, which does not have formal consequences. However, the report does provide the programme with additional input to prevent unexpected weaknesses at the accreditation renewal phase. In addition to the follow-up procedure, programmes are required to request an external modification report in case of major changes in their design in between two accreditation rounds.

In the DOCENTIA programme, an annual desk-based follow-up is performed by the agency. The external assessment of university centres is only performed at their creation, recognition, modification, suppression or change in affiliation. There is no systematic follow-up by the agency.

The external evaluation of university centres is considered to be a once-off activity to provide the regional Government with the necessary information for the creation, recognition, modification, suppression or affiliation of university centres. No specific follow-up procedure is, therefore, provided.

The assessment reports, as can be seen in ACSUCYL's website, include general information on the stages of the process and the assessment of the centre/programme that has been evaluated. They also include the evaluation and recommendations for improvement. In the case of degree assessment and the Elenchos programme, the date on which the centre/degree must undergo extra follow-up is also indicated in case of conditional accreditation.

To ensure that the processes undertaken by ACSUCYL are reliable, useful and consistent, the following mechanisms are employed:

- Design and publication of standards and methodological tools (through handbooks and guides) that act as the reference framework for each assessment.
- Training and informative sessions geared towards the higher education institutions involved.
- Training days for experts who participate in the assessment processes on the application of the standards, methodology, report writing and the conduct of visits.
- ACSUCYL staff coordination of all the stages of the assessment process, thereby ultimately ensuring its coherence and consistency, from an overall perspective of the action carried out by the agency.

## **Analysis**

The panel confirms that each review process performed by ACSUCYL is based on a framework that is reliable, publicised, and pre-defined. The evidence collected in the interviews with different stakeholders indicates that those review processes are regarded as useful and implemented consistently. All procedures and handbooks are available on the agency's website and training is provided for experts to apply those frameworks consistently.

As described above, the agency has set up a structure with assessment commissions, and for programme level assessments knowledge area committees, which takes care of the consistency between procedures within the same evaluation scheme. Those bodies check all panel reports for consistency before they are finalised. In the view of the panel this structure contributes to the consistency in the results of quality assurance processes.

Although the processes for verification, modification, follow-up and accreditation renewal are presented as separate evaluation schemes, the panel considers that they should be considered together to assess this standard. Taking into account the different steps of external quality assurance at programme level, the panel confirms that the combination of the evaluation programmes guarantees a comprehensive external quality assurance system, including self-assessment, external assessment, including site visits for the crucial steps of the process, public reports and a consistent follow-up.

As indicated previously, the Elenchos programme is being implemented in a pilot phase at the time of the ENQA review. This programme will replace a major part of the external quality assurance processes at programme level. Based on the information provided, the panel has no doubt that this programme will be based on self-assessment, site-visits and public reports. As only the design of the first phase of the Elenchos programme had been finalised at the time of the review, the panel was not able to confirm exactly how the follow-up will be performed. It can confirm, however, that the agency is committed to implementing a sound follow-up system for the Elenchos programme.

Within the DOCENTIA programme, the first steps of the process are desk-based processes which lead to a public report. Only in the certification phase is a site-visit conducted. Overall, the panel is convinced that this approach is sufficient for this voluntary programme.

Taking into account the other external quality assurance processes which guarantee that all Bachelor's, Master's and PhD programmes are reviewed regularly, the panel considers that the processes for the external evaluation of university centres satisfies the ESG requirements by including a self-assessment, an external assessment and a public report, with follow-up in cases of fundamental change in the status of the university centre.

Finally, the panel received feedback that the self-critical nature of self-assessment reports could be increased. The panel relates this to the overall approach to quality assurance in the region and in Spain. The panel hopes that a shift towards institutional accreditation may contribute to a more qualitative and reflective approach to quality assurance processes.

Notwithstanding the above, the panel is convinced that the current extensive external quality assurance framework fully complies with the standard, it would challenge the agency's contention that site visits are not necessary for ex-ante assessments. Especially when external quality assurance moves towards a more qualitative approach, a programme or a centre may benefit very much from a direct exchange with a panel of high-level experts to optimise the implementation of its new activities from the start.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

#### **ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS**

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

#### **Evidence**

ACSUCYL's external quality assurance processes are carried out by its assessment commissions, with the advice of expert panels, whose profiles are set out in ACSUCYL's regulations (Articles 14 and 16 of Decree 15/2015 of 19 February). The technical and professional profiles of the experts taking part in each assessment programme are detailed in the protocols that serve as a guide to the running of the programme. For all education-related assessments, panels include student members.

Whenever site visits are organised, ad hoc panels are set up. The composition depends on the nature of the degree for which the visit is made.

For the evaluation procedures at degree level, the Degree Assessment Commission has composed Knowledge area committees, which consist of:

- External experts who are scientists and scholars from universities or research centres not located in Castilla y León, who have a long-standing career in teaching or research, and who are specialists in the area of knowledge being assessed as well as being experienced in quality assessment processes.
- Non-academic experts, renowned in the area being assessed.
- Students with experience in quality assessment processes in higher education

In general terms, the external visit panel for each degree is made up of four experts, including, in addition to scholars, a student and/or a non-academic expert. One member of the external committee shall be in charge of each visit per degree.

Within the Elenchos programme, the Institutional Quality Assessment Commission composes assessment panels for the execution of site visits which are made up of:

- A president, who shall be a scholar from a university located outside Castilla y León, with a distinguished teaching or research career, and who is an expert in higher education systems and university quality assurance processes.
- Two external experts in higher education systems and university quality assurance processes from universities or research centres located outside Castilla y León, with experience in quality assurance processes, at least one of whom will be a scientist and/or scholar with a distinguished teaching or research career. One of the external experts shall act as committee secretary.
- A student, preferably with skills and/or experience in quality assurance systems and processes in higher education.
- An external expert from the labour sector towards which the training provided at the centres is geared.

For the evaluation of university centres, the Institutional Quality Assessment Commission composes assessment panels for the execution of site visits which are made up of scientists and scholars from universities or research centres located outside Castilla y León, and who have a significant teaching or research career, who are specialists in the area of knowledge being evaluated and who are experienced in quality assessment. When the nature of the assessment in question so requires, every effort is made to include non-academic experts who are renowned in the area that is subject to evaluation, as well as students who are experienced in quality assessment in higher education.

Based on the profiles established in each assessment process, experts for commissions and panels are pre-selected by the agency's technical staff and consequently are formally appointed by the Director of the agency. Experts are selected from a database of more than 11,000 evaluators that ACSUCYL has built over the past years. Of the almost 4,000 members of the database that have taken part in some assessment process in the last four years: 2,951 are university teachers, 487 are researchers, 168 are students, 111 are professionals, and 27 are technological experts (persons carrying out applied research or involved in technology transfer). In addition, contact with other quality assurance agencies in Spain allows the agency to continue recruiting experts who are experienced in external quality assurance procedures.

As set out in ACSUCYL's regulations and as described in the agency's IQAS evaluator management procedure, all of the experts are required to sign a document agreeing to cooperate with the agency together with a declaration of no-conflict-of-interests. In addition, in the document they also expressly agree to abide by ACSUCYL's Code of Ethics, which sets out the commitment to act with impartiality and objectivity when carrying out their tasks.

Prior to the implementation of the evaluation activities, the agency provides experts with training to inform them about how to conduct the assessment process and its contextualisation within the Spanish and European university quality assurance system, and how to achieve consistency in the assessments carried out by the various experts in addition to writing appropriate reports. Recently, the agency has started to make audiovisual recordings of its training days and make them available to all the experts so that they may be consulted at any time or viewed by those unable to attend the meetings in person.

To follow-up the quality of the experts that the agency works with, the chairperson and secretary of each panel are asked for feedback on the performance of the experts working in their panels at the end of each assessment process.

### **Analysis**

All procedures under review that are within the scope of ESG 2015 are carried out by panels of external experts which include a student member. Experts are mainly selected from the extensive database managed by the agency.

The agency indicates that the recruitment of student members for panels and commissions remains a challenge. The panel encourages the agency to continue to invest time and resources in outreach to students. While the members of the Student Board can definitely help to develop strategies to reach out to students, it is the responsibility of the agency itself to convince students of the added value of cooperating with ACSUCYL at all levels of its work and increase opportunities for student representatives to take more active and collaborative role in the agency. The agency's recent collaboration with the European Students' Union (ESU) to organise a training session on evaluating online degrees is in the opinion of the panel a step in the right direction. The agency might learn from other Spanish and European agencies who manage to attract plenty of talented students who are willing to contribute to the work of quality assurance agencies.

ACSUCYL does not include in its panels academic staff who are active within the higher education system in Castilla y León in order to guarantee their independence. Still, most experts in commissions and panels are from other Spanish regions. As the approach to higher education is relatively similar in the different Spanish regions, the panel encourages the agency to increase its efforts to ensure the presence of international experts in review panels. At present, the agency has a limited number of experts with an international profile in three of its four standing assessment bodies (Institutional Quality Assessment Commission, Degree Assessment Commission, Research Assessment Commission) as well as on its Advisory Board. On the review panels, which have direct interaction with the programmes and institutions under review, almost no international experts are involved. Especially in the case of Master's and PhD programmes which often have a stronger international orientation than undergraduate programmes, the presence of international experts is extremely relevant, to bring in high level expertise, perspectives from different educational traditions.

In the composition of the panels and commissions the agency endeavours to create gender parity. While the panel appreciates those efforts, it still sees room for improvement in this area. The panel encourages the agency to continue to invest in the composition of diverse panels.

In order to further broaden the pool of potential experts, the agency might consider to review the self-nomination of experts. Foreign experts who may be interested to join an ACSUCYL panel may not be aware of the procedures to self-nominate. A more open search is, therefore, probably useful to systematically involve the most competent international experts in the agency's review panels.

The panel members interviewed by the review panel were positive about the training and guidance they receive from ACSUCYL. They explicitly commend the agency for its flexibility to provide online training and individual support in case an expert cannot attend a regular training session or needs specific training. Although the agency pays attention to the reasoning behind the new ESG, this has not led to a full understanding of concepts such as student centred learning, teaching and assessment among all experts, yet. This is reflected in the assessment reports the agency publishes and was also reflected in the exchanges the review panel had during the site visit. The panel,

therefore, encourages the agency to continue to focus on the values and concepts underpinning the 2015 ESG in the training provided to new and existing peer review experts.

#### **Panel recommendations**

- The panel recommends the agency to continue to focus on the values and concepts underpinning the 2015 ESG in the training provided to new and existing peer review experts.

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement:**

- The panel suggests that the agency takes greater care to maintain an appropriate gender balance when selecting its panels.
- The panel suggests that the agency strengthens its efforts to increase the involvement of international experts in its review panels and commissions.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

#### **ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES**

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

#### **Evidence**

The assessment criteria applied by ACSUCYL in any of its programmes, as well as the procedure followed, are defined by the assessment commissions and made public in the section of the agency's website corresponding to each programme, before the process starts, so that they may be consulted by any interested party. In addition to being published, they are also presented to universities in Castilla y León in information meetings organised by ACSUCYL prior to the start of any process. In this way, the agency has a forum in which any doubts that may arise concerning the process to be carried out can be dealt with.

The agency pays special attention to ensuring that the processes are conducted effectively and that the standards are applied consistently and correctly. The main mechanisms in this regard are:

- The work carried out by the assessment commissions given that, as set out in ACSUCYL'S regulations, one of its duties is to ensure consistency in the application of the assessment processes.
- Training/informative sessions provided for the evaluators, prior to the start of each assessment process and which address the procedure, method and assessment criteria.
- Informative meetings with the universities at the start of all the processes to ensure the correct interpretation of the standards and clear up any doubts that may arise.
- The work done by the agency's technical staff, who oversee the correct application of the assessment criteria in each process. The technical staff attend the meetings and visits of the experts, and have the right to speak but without being able to take part in the decisions, coordinating and acting as a link between the various evaluators taking part in a given programme, making sure that they apply the standards in the same way and that the appraisals they make are based on the evidence.
- In the degree assessment processes, where the experts charged with the scientific-technical evaluation of the files work to conduct their evaluations in assessment committees by areas

of knowledge, a member of the assessment committee is designated as chairperson of each committee and is present throughout the assessment process and supervises it. In the specific case of the DOCENTIA programme, there is a single specific assessment committee for the systems of all the universities, thereby guaranteeing consistency.

- In each evaluation, a scientific-technical evaluation is conducted by various experts, in a panel size that is determined in the protocol established for each process and the assessment decisions are taken jointly, thereby ensuring consistency in the assessments. For instance, in the degree and institutional quality assessment processes each programme/institution is evaluated by four experts (two academics, a student and a professional).
- All of the processes have reference documents dealing with the application of standards and assessment reports, which may be consulted at any time.
- Assessment of the performance of experts, through questionnaires which provide useful information concerning possible deviations that may arise.

The agency provides the opportunity to hold joint meetings of various Commissions in order to gain consistency in those processes in which there may be a link between the aspects analysed by those Commissions. For example, this may be the case with the Degree Assessment Commission and the Institutional Quality Assessment Commission in the processes carried out for the accreditation of degrees and institutional accreditation respectively.

### **Analysis**

During the site visit, the review panel was able to confirm that the criteria and protocols are public and easily accessible to all stakeholders. The agency organises regular meetings with the higher education institutions before an evaluation starts. The views expressed in the various meetings indicated a positive disposition towards the consistency and fairness of the different review processes.

The agency's Assessment Commissions have an important role in guaranteeing the consistent application of review procedures. At programme level, five knowledge area committees are responsible for the revision of each report produced within their knowledge area to increase consistency between those reports. Finally, the Degree Assessment Commission takes care for the consistency between the activities of the different committees. The agency's reports form the basis for formal decisions by the University Council of the Spanish ministry. Only in the follow-up phase is no formal decision taken. Those reports only provide input for the accreditation renewal procedure. Based on its discussions with different stakeholders, the review panel is convinced that this approach guarantees a high level of consistency without creating unnecessary bureaucracy.

For all activities under the DOCENTIA programmes, a separate committee is responsible, which takes care of the consistency over time and between institutions. The reports are published on the agency's website, and upon positive evaluation of the implementation of the quality assurance system for teaching quality of university staff, ACSUCYL grants certification of this system as the formal outcome of this process.

The Institutional Assessment Commission has been composed with its main goal being to implement the Elenchos programme. Separate panels are responsible for the individual assessments, but also at this level the Commission is taking care to ensure consistency between the judgements of different assessment panels and reports. The assessment of the internal quality assurance system of a university centre leads to certification by ACSUCYL. Based on this certification and the evaluation as

to whether the criteria for institutional accreditation are met, the agency publishes a report which is the basis for formal institutional accreditation by the University Council.

The Institutional Assessment Commission is also responsible for the assessments for the creation, suppression and affiliation of universities centres. The reports of those assessments are used as the basis for the formal decision by the Regional Ministry of Education of Castilla y León.

**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**

All of the assessment reports issued by ACSUCYL are made public through its website, generally together with all information related to the specific evaluation scheme. For reports on Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees, the agency has developed a browser through which to access all the reports. The browser offers the chance to search for the degrees by university, level, area, assessment process, and name. Together with the assessment reports, the agency also provides access to information on programmes available at the university where they are taught. It also includes the decisions taken, based on ACSUCYL'S assessment reports, by the University Council, as the competent body that concludes the procedures. The publication of reports by ACSUCYL and the decisions taken by University Council are coordinated so that they occur at the same time.

The format of reports generally includes information on the assessment process and on the programme or centre subject to assessment as well as the strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement, together with the assessments for each one of the standards plus an overall evaluation of the centre.

Each assessment report is drafted by the panel and finalised by the assessment commission involved in the process in question. To ensure that all reports are written in a clear and easy to understand style, experts and panel secretaries are trained by the agency in how to write the reports. The work of the secretary here is key because this person is ultimately responsible for preparing the reports. The agency has also drawn up a series of guidelines for writing reports. The structure of the reports is defined by the agency. In addition to these mechanisms that are applied to ensure the reports are written correctly and are consistent, there is also the coordination work undertaken by the agency staff handling the processes. The texts contained in the reports are reviewed before their final approval by the assessment commission in order to make sure that when they are sent to the universities/institutions and are made public, the style is clear and does not give rise to confusion. To ensure this, the processes include the submission of a draft report against which universities may suggest the correction of factual inaccuracies.

#### **Analysis**

All expert reports are published on the agency's website. The review panel has analysed a selection of those reports and has found that in general, these were competently written. The way in which

the reports are written clearly reflects the agency's ambition to write constructive reports which provide the universities with suggestions for improvement.

The panel analysed the reports of the different evaluation schemes and comes to the following conclusions:

- Reports on verification consist of a description of the procedure and an overall judgement, where relevant complemented with recommendations for improvement. Those reports do not provide the readership with any justification of the overall judgement, nor an evaluation per standard. It does not cover in detail the analysis and findings.
- Report on modifications describe the requested changes, an overall assessment and recommendations per standard.
- For Bachelor's and Master's programmes, no reports on follow-up procedures have been published on the agency's website between 2014 and 2019, but all published reports do provide detailed feedback per standard. For PhD programmes, some reports were published in 2018, which also provide extensive feedback per standard and some suggestions for improvement.
- Reports on ex-post accreditation procedures provide a description of the assessment process, an overall evaluation, as well as a justification per standard. Suggestions for improvement and best practices are mentioned in the overall evaluation and under the specific standards, but are not summarised separately.
- No reports of the Elenchos programme had been published at the time of the site visit as the pilot phase had not yet been finalised. The panel received a preliminary report on the certification of the internal quality assurance system of a university centre. In this report the evaluation per standard have been substantiated extensively, while the overall evaluation depends on the outcome and on how the centre fulfils or does not fulfil the requirements. The reports contain a short justification, as well as suggestions for improvement. Also the process is described in the report.
- All DOCENTIA reports include the description of the procedure, including experts involved, a (short) overall conclusion, as well as suggestions for improvement. Wherever necessary, mandatory improvements are mentioned. Only in the verification reports is explicit reference made to the evaluation criteria.
- In the reports on the creation, recognition, modification, suppression or change in affiliation a description of the procedure, an overall conclusion and a short description per standard is provided. Suggestions for improvement and best practices are not highlighted separately.

Overall, the review panel sees room for improvement in the reports through providing a broader description of the programme/centre under review, including information on its specific profile and strengths. Where absent, it would be relevant to add explicit justification per standard. Furthermore, the decisive arguments which lead to a positive, conditional or negative evaluation are not always clearly articulated in the reports. Recommendations for improvement reflect the constructive approach the Agency aims for in most reports. Wherever those recommendations are not made explicit, it would be good to mention them more explicitly. Explicit reference to good practices would be appreciated by those responsible for the programme or institute under review, but are also valuable as an inspiration for others.

Before the final report is issued, the institution always has a chance to point out factual errors. The relevant Assessment Commission is responsible to process those comments and then issue the final report. As indicated under ESG 2.7, appeals procedures are in place after the publication of the final report.

Although the agency has improved the quality of its reports, they remain quite technical in nature and are, therefore, first of all aimed at the higher education institutions under review. The agency nevertheless has the ambition to provide (potential) students and the broader society with insights in the quality of the higher education which is offered in Castilla y León. Although the panel values the browser which the agency provides to search for reports and other information about specific degrees, the panel does not consider the available information to be very helpful for students who want to compare programmes or for other interested individuals. The panel, therefore, recommends that ACSUCYL continues to search for better ways to disclose the results of its quality assurance processes. It might be relevant to seek feedback from students, employers and other potential users of the information on their needs and to what extent the current structure fulfils those needs.

### **Panel recommendations**

- The panel recommends to add in the reports where those elements are lacking a specific justification per standard, the decisive elements leading to the overall evaluation, including the analysis, findings, conclusions, recommendations for improvement and feature of good practice.
- The panel recommends to continue to search for ways to disclose the results of the agency's quality assurance processes better to all stakeholders, including students and employers.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## **ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

### **The 2014 ENQA review recommendation on ENQA Criterion 8:**

- The Agency should consider revising its appeals procedure so a separate committee handles this process and not the commission that is responsible for running the review processes.

### **Evidence**

In order to comply with the recommendation of the previous ENQA review, ACSUCYL set up an Appeals Committee. This committee has changed its name to the Guarantees Commission in an effort to widen the scope of its functions. The Guarantees Commission currently pursues the following goals:

- To advise the agency's governing, assessment and consultative bodies and to ensure the foreseen guarantees the proper functioning of the processes, the administrative procedures and, in general, the smooth running of the agency.
- To examine the appeals, complaints, reviews and grievances put before the agency's bodies and to report thereon, ensuring the correct application of the established procedures, compliance with the agency's Code of Ethics and Quality Policy.

The regulations governing the functioning of the Guarantees Commission are published on the agency's website together with the composition thereof, such that they can be consulted by any interested party.

The Commission functions independently from the agency's structure. It is made up of three renowned academic, scientific, and professional experts, who are familiar with the agency's goals

and functions, and who do not undertake their professional activity nor hold any representative post in universities in Castilla y León. A senior technical officer from the agency acts as the secretary, who has the right to speak but not vote at meetings of the Commission. None of the members of the Commission are involved in the assessment processes carried out by the agency.

The Guarantees Commission is competent regarding:

- any actions and claims in defence of agency's rights and interests;
- optional appeals for reversal or reconsideration as well as for extraordinary review against the decisions of the assessment commissions;
- appeals against final acts of the agency bodies;
- claims against agreements and acts of the Director or the Board of Directors;
- reviews of assessment reports;
- complaints received against the agency.

In all of the agency's assessment processes the institution gets the opportunity to provide factual comments to the reports before the assessment commission takes its final decision on the reports. In addition, all the assessment processes for external quality assurance carried out by the agency envisage the possibility of filing an appeal against the final assessment decisions.

In the assessment protocols and on the agency's website in the sections devoted to each of the processes, the appeals channels through which the reports may be challenged are specified, as well as identifying the relevant competent body.

Depending on the assessment procedure, the body which takes the formal decision differs. Appeals should be filed with the same body which takes the formal decision:

- Degree assessment:
  - Verification/Modification: University Council of the Spanish ministry.
  - Follow up: ACSUCYL.
  - Accreditation renewal: University Council of the Spanish ministry.
- DOCENTIA Programme: ACSUCYL.
- ELENCHOS Programme:
  - Certification of implementation of IQAS: ACSUCYL.
  - Institutional accreditation: University Council.
- Assessment for the creation, suppression of centres: Regional Ministry of Education (Castilla y León).

In any case, the agency's Guarantees Commission is responsible for examining the appeals or complaints in areas where the agency is competent. The appeals procedure which is applicable depends on the body which is responsible for taking the final decision. When the agency is responsible for the final outcome of the procedure, the Guarantees Commission will investigate the appeal. When the appeal is upheld, the original assessment must be reviewed by the body which was responsible for the original assessment. When the formal decision belongs to the University Council or the Regional Ministry of Education, their appeals procedure applies. In case of a negative decision by the University Council or the Regional Ministry of Education, the higher education institution may file an appeal before the administrative courts. In case of an appeal, the Council of Universities or the Regional Ministry of Education, asks ACSUCYL for input. Within ACSUCYL, the request will be sent to the Guarantees Commission, which consults the relevant Assessment Commission, before preparing an answer. If the Council of Universities or the Regional Ministry of Education accepts the appeal, it will ask ACSUCYL to review its decision. Also in this case the same body which was responsible for the original assessment will be responsible for the review of its assessment.

Between its set-up in 2015 and April 2019, the Guarantees Commission examined 32 appeals out of the 1,163 degree assessments carried out (2.75% of the assessments are challenged). Of these, 20 are related to assessment reports for the renewal of accreditation process, eight to assessment reports for the modification of official degrees, and four to assessment reports related to the verification of official degrees.

The involvement of the Guarantees Commission is also envisaged in cases of grievances and suggestions concerning issues of particular technical or legal complexity. No suggestions of this kind have been submitted to the Guarantees Commission, yet.

### **Analysis**

The 2014 ENQA review panel recommended the agency to consider revising its appeals procedure so that a separate committee handles this process and not the commission that is responsible for running the review processes. The review panel confirms that the agency has created a separate Guarantees Commission which handles all appeals which are submitted to the agency and which may provide input to external bodies which are responsible for formal decisions based on the agency's reports.

Although a number of appeals have been filed, none of the appeals was related to procedures where the agency takes the final decision. Whenever the Guarantees Commission accepts an appeal in this case, the body which performed the original review will be asked to perform a new review. As this has not happened yet, the panel does not have evidence as to whether this approach fully guarantees a process which leads to satisfactory outcomes for all parties. The panel encourages the agency to monitor closely how well the current appeals procedure works in the case of internal decision making.

The panel welcomes the agency to guarantee the independence of the members of the Guarantees Commission both from the expert committee and the assessment commissions and from the higher education institutions involved in the assessments being contested.

Although no formal complaints have been filed, yet, it is positive that formal complaints are managed by a separate body. The panel received feedback that higher education institutions have extensive opportunities to give feedback to the agency on its work. This may be a good reason why no formal complaints have been submitted, yet. The agency indicated that in some appeals also complaints have been integrated. Still, the panel encourages the agency to perform more detailed research into why no complaints have been submitted, yet and whether any changes may be needed to lower the threshold for institutions to file a complaint.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

- The panel commends the agency for the efficient and effective use of the resources the Government provides (ESG 3.5).
- The panel commends the agency for its pro-activity in seeking to influence the design of future quality assurance processes (ESG 2.2).

## OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, ACSUCYL is in compliance with the ESG.

The ESGs where full compliance have been achieved are:

- Part 3 – 3.2, 3.3 and 3.7.
- Part 2 – 2.3, 2.5 and 2.7.

The ESGs where substantial compliance have been achieved are:

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

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

In order for ACSUSYL to work towards full compliance with the ESG, the panel provides the following recommendations, which have already been signalled in the previous sections:

- The panel recommends the agency to further increase the involvement of students in its Governing and Advisory Board (ESG 3.1)
- The panel recommends the agency to structurally develop reports that describe and analyse the general findings of the agency's individual review processes quality assurance activities in order to inform (potential) students, the regional Government and society at large (ESG 3.4).
- The panel recommends that the agency seeks an agreement with the Regional Government which provides security on budgets through multi-annual funding and to discuss whether more diversified income streams may be useful to increase the independence of the agency (ESG 3.5).
- The panel recommends that the agency secures sufficient resources to extend its work on thematic analysis to enable it to implement the panel's recommendations mentioned under ESG 3.4 (ESG 3.5).
- The panel recommends the agency to complement the process-oriented approach of internal quality assurance with a more self-critical attitude and further strengthen the focus on the impact of its work on the quality of higher education in Castilla y León (ESG 3.6).
- The panel recommends the agency to further integrate the concept of student-centred learning, teaching and assessment as a core element in all its procedures (ESG 2.1).
- The panel recommends the agency to search for a better balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches in its quality assurance procedures in order to further increase the fitness for purpose of the external quality assurance system as a whole (ESG 2.2).
- The panel recommends involving students and international experts more in the development of quality assurance processes (ESG 2.2).
- The panel encourages the agency, together with the Regional Government to reflect on whether the combination of those processes at centre/institute level continues to be the optimal framework, and whether further streamlining of the different processes might be useful (ESG 2.2).

- The panel recommends the agency to continue to focus on the values and concepts underpinning the 2015 ESG in the training provided to new and existing peer review experts (ESG 2.4).
- The panel recommends to add in the reports where those elements are lacking a specific justification per standard, the decisive elements leading to the overall evaluation, including the analysis, findings, conclusions, recommendations for improvement and feature of good practice (ESG 2.6).
- The panel recommends to continue to search for ways to disclose the results of the agency's quality assurance processes better to all stakeholders, including students and employers (ESG 2.6).

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

Additionally, the panel provides some suggestions for ACSUSYL to further optimise its work as a quality assurance agency, which have already been signalled in the previous sections:

- The panel suggests the agency might involve more international perspectives in its governance and work to contribute different perspectives on how higher education and its quality assurance can be organised (ESG 3.1).
- The panel suggests that the agency raise its efforts to guarantee a gender balance in its governance and advisory bodies (ESG 3.6).
- The panel suggests that the agency takes greater care to maintain an appropriate gender balance when selecting its panels (ESG 2.4).
- The panel suggests that the agency strengthens its efforts to increase the involvement of international experts in its review panels and commissions (ESG 2.4).

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

ARRIVAL DAY: 25.06.2019		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
17:30	Review panel preparatory meeting	
19.00	Meeting with the Director and the ACSUCYL resource person to discuss the national context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• José Ángel Domínguez. Director</li> <li>• Sandra Marcos. Head of International and institutional affairs.</li> </ul>
DAY 1: 26.06.2019		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
8.30--9.00	Review panel private meeting	
9.00-10.00	Meeting with the Director of ACSUCYL and Head of International and Institutional Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• José Ángel Domínguez (director)</li> <li>• Sandra Marcos (head of international and institutional affairs)</li> </ul>
10.00-10.10	Discussion among panel members	
10.10-10.50	Meeting with the team responsible for the self-assessment report and Internal Quality Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• José Ángel Domínguez (director)</li> <li>• Sandra Marcos (head of international and institutional affairs)</li> <li>• Susana Cacho (head of financial issues)</li> <li>• Jaime Diez (head of IT)</li> </ul>
10.50-11.20	Discussion among panel members	
11.20-12.20	Meeting with the ACSUCYL Board of Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fernando Gutiérrez (head of the teaching service of the general direction of universities and research)</li> <li>• Miriam Cortés (rector of the Pontifical University of Salamanca - UPSA)</li> <li>• Rocio Hervella (employer)</li> </ul>
12.20-12.30	Discussion among panel members	
12.30-13.20	Meeting with the Advisory Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Juan José Mateos (chair)</li> <li>• José Alija (secretary)</li> <li>• Elena Tejedor (expert in HE)</li> <li>• Alfredo Dagnino (professional)</li> </ul>
13.20-14.30	Lunch	
14.30-15.15	Meeting with the Student Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rodrigo Nieto (University of Valladolid - UVA)</li> <li>• Pablo González (UVA)</li> <li>• Esmeralda Román (UPSA)</li> </ul>
15.15-15.25	Discussion among panel members	
15.25-16.15	Meeting with vice-rectors of HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purificación Galindo (University of Salamanca - USAL)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begoña Prieto (University of Burgos - UBU)</li> <li>• Abel Calle (UVA)</li> <li>• Alicia Rodriguez (University of León - ULE)</li> <li>• David García (Miguel de Cervantes European University – Valladolid - UEMC)</li> <li>• Pedro Sangro (UPSA)</li> </ul>
16.15-16.45	Discussion among panel members	
16.45-17.45	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sara Junquera (IE University – Segovia - IE)</li> <li>• Consuelo Saiz (UBU)</li> <li>• Dolores Olivera (UEMC)</li> <li>• María Penado (Isabel I de Castilla International University – Burgos - UI1C)</li> <li>• Maria Paz Muñoz (Santa Teresa de Jesús Catholic University of Ávila - UCAV)</li> </ul>
17.45-18.15	Tour of the agency's facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• José Ángel Domínguez (director)</li> <li>• Jaime Díez (head of IT)</li> <li>• Sandra Marcos (head of international and institutional affairs)</li> </ul>
18:15-19:00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members	
<b>DAY 2: 27.06.2019</b>		
<b>TIMING</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW</b>
8.30-9.00	Review panel private meeting	
9.00-10.00	Meeting with the Guarantees Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guillermo Martínez (former member of the guarantee commission)</li> <li>• Amaya Urbaneja (secretary of the guarantee commission)</li> <li>• Manuel Rebollo (academic) <a href="#">SKYPE</a></li> </ul>
10.00-10.10	Discussion among panel members	
10.10-11.10	Meeting with representatives of the Degree Assessment Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mariano López (secretary)</li> <li>• Juan Carlos Tojar (academic)</li> <li>• F. Javier Zamora (academic)</li> <li>• Julio Peralta (professional) <a href="#">SKYPE</a></li> <li>• Francisco Arnalich (academic) <a href="#">SKYPE</a></li> </ul>
11.10-11.40	Discussion among panel members	
11.40-12.30	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool for degree assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fernando Merino (academic)</li> <li>• Julius Jan Szczesniewski (student)</li> <li>• Luis Barbero (professional)</li> <li>• M<sup>a</sup> Elena Olabarri (academic)</li> <li>• Jose Luis Pedrera (academic)</li> <li>• Patrocinio Rodriguez (academic)</li> </ul>
12.30-12.40	Discussion among panel members	
12.40-14.00	Lunch	

14.00-15.00	Meeting with representatives of the Institutional Quality Assessment Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eduardo García (expert HE)</li> <li>• Arturo Galán (academic)</li> <li>• Rosendo Pou (secretary) <a href="#">SKYPE</a></li> <li>• Laura Beccari (international expert HE) <a href="#">SKYPE</a></li> </ul>
15.00-15.10	Discussion among panel members	
15.10-16.00	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool for institutional quality assessment	<p><i>ELENCHOS</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rosa María Martínez (academic)</li> <li>• Alberto Poncela (academic)</li> <li>• Alejandro Baldominos (student)</li> <li>• Jacobo F. Navarro (expert HE)</li> <li>• Jean Alberto Garcia Rodriguez (professional)</li> </ul> <p><i>DOCENTIA</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guillermo Jáñez (student)</li> </ul>
16.00-16.30	Discussion among panel members	
16.30-17.20	Meeting with representatives of the Research Assessment Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maria del Mar Malagón (researcher)</li> <li>• Vicente Pallás (researcher)</li> <li>• Lourdes Ramos (researcher)</li> <li>• Mechthild Albert (chair) <a href="#">SKYPE</a></li> </ul>
17.20-17.30	Discussion among panel members	
17.30-18.20	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool for research assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manuel De León (researcher)</li> <li>• Sebastian Chavez Serra (researcher)</li> </ul>
	Wrap-up meeting among panel members	
<b>DAY 3: 28.06.2019</b>		
<b>TIMING</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW</b>
9.00-10.00	Meeting with the staff of ACSUCYL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eva María Baticón (responsible for assessing accreditation centres and secretary of the student commission)</li> <li>• Raúl Casado (responsible for assessing degrees and institutional accreditation)</li> <li>• Carlos Guerra (responsible for assessing research and DOCENTIA programme)</li> <li>• Sonia Martín (responsible for assessing doctoral degrees)</li> <li>• Begoña Salas (administrative)</li> </ul>
10.00-11.00	Morning meeting among panel members to agree on final lines of enquiry	
11.00-11.45	Meeting with the Director and Agency resource person to clarify any pending issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• José Ángel Dominguez (director)</li> <li>• Sandra Marcos (head of international and institutional affairs)</li> </ul>
11.45-13.30	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings	
13.30-14.30	Lunch	

14.30-15.00	Final debriefing meeting with the ACSUCYL Director and staff to inform about the panel's preliminary findings	
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A translator was available for those stakeholders who wanted to speak in Spanish.

## ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

### Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

January 2019

#### 1. Background and Context

ACSUCYL is independent from the regional government, directed by a Board of Directors. ACSUCYL was legally set up in November 2001 as the external assessment body for the university system in Castilla y León and is aimed at the assessment, accreditation and certification of quality at universities and research and higher education institutions in Castilla y León.

In addition, ACSUCYL can also collaborate in the processes of assessment, accreditation and certification of Universities and higher education institutions outside the Autonomous Region of Castilla y León in the context of the European Higher Education Area.

The activities of assessment, accreditation and certification developed by the Agency, aim at achieving the following general purposes:

- a) To foster the improvement of teaching and research activity and management of Universities and research and higher education institutions, encouraging the improvement of competitiveness and economic development of Castilla y León.
- b) To provide adequate information about the university system to public Administrations, the productive sector and society in general, for making decisions in their areas of action.

ACSUCYL's mission, vision, and values form the basis for determining the objectives and action plans to be carried out.

**Mission:** To ensure ongoing improvement in higher education and to provide information concerning the work it is conducting such that this may prove useful to all stakeholders.

**Vision:** To become a benchmark in quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area thanks to the value of our work and the effective contribution it makes to higher education.

#### **Values:**

The values which define the way the Agency works are:

- Independence when performing its duties.
- Transparency in the work it carries out.
- Effectiveness and efficiency in its operation, optimising available resources.
- Responsibility in all of its actions, establishing mechanisms to make it accountable so as to improve the work it undertakes.
- User orientation by constantly adapting the services it provides to its users' needs and expectations.
- Proactivity and anticipation by engaging in innovative action aimed at constant improvement.

ACSUCYL has been an ENQA member since 2010 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

ACSUCYL has been registered on EQAR since 2010 and is applying for renewal of EQAR registration.

## **2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

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

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

### **2.1 Activities of ACSUCYL within the scope of the ESG**

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

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

- Verification of official degrees (ex-ante accreditation)/modification
- Follow-up of official degrees
- Renewal of accreditation of official degrees (ex-post accreditation)
- Institutional accreditation (ELENCHOS Programme)
- Certification of the implementation of the internal quality assurance system (ELENCHOS Programme)
- Teaching performance assessment programme (DOCENTIA Programme)
- Evaluation to create, recognize, modify or withdraw university centres
- University research institutes (ex-ante evaluation)
- Periodic evaluation of university research institutes.

## **3. The Review Process**

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

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

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

### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an

ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide ACSUCYL 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 ACSUCYL review.

### **3.2 Self-assessment by ACSUCYL, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

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

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which ACSUCYL fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

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

The review panel will be assisted by ACSUCYL in arriving in Valladolid, Spain.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on compliance or granting of ENQA membership.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 6. Budget

ACSUCYL shall pay the following review related fees:

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

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

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

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

## 7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	December 2018/January 2019
Appointment of review panel members	February 2019
Self-assessment completed	31 March 2019
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	April 2019

Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	May 2019
Briefing of review panel members	June 2019
Review panel site visit	Late June 2019
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	Early September 2019
Draft of evaluation report to ACSUCYL	Late September 2019
Statement of ACSUCYL to review panel if necessary	Early October 2019
Submission of final report to ENQA	Mid-October 2019
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of ACSUCYL	November (depending on the date of the ENQA Board meeting)
Publication of the report	December 2019/January 2020

### ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ACSUCYL	Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León
ANECA	Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación – National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines (for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area)
HE	Higher Education
IE	IE University – Segovia
IQAS	Internal Quality Assurance System
LOU	Ley Orgánica de Universidades - Spanish Framework Law Governing Universities
LOMLOU	Ley Orgánica de Modificación de la Ley Orgánica de Universidades - Spanish Framework modifying the Law Governing Universities
REACU	Red Española de Agencias de Calidad Universitaria – Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
RUCT	Registro de Universidades, Centros y Títulos - Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees
UBU	University of Burgos
UCAV	Santa Teresa de Jesús Catholic University of Ávila
UEMC	Miguel de Cervantes European University – Valladolid
UI1C	Isabel I de Castilla International University – Burgos
ULE	University of León
UPSA	Pontifical University of Salamanca
USAL	University of Salamanca
UVA	University of Valladolid

## **ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW**

### **DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ACSUCYL BEFORE THE SITE VISIT**

- Self-Assessment Report 2019
- Assessment bodies
- Governing bodies
- Consultative bodies
- Verification/modification protocol
- Follow-up protocol
- Renewal of accreditation protocol
- DOCENTIA protocol
- ELENCHOS protocol
- Centres protocol
- Institutes protocol

### **ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ACSUCYL ON REQUEST OF THE REVIEW PANEL**

- Minutes of a Governing Board meeting
- Minutes of a Student Board meeting
- Management of experts procedure
- Examples of accreditation renewal reports
- Example of Elenchos certification of internal quality assurance system report
- Thematic analysis report
- Correspondence between the agency and the Regional Government for the 2019 budget



**THIS REPORT** presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL), undertaken in 2019.

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**2019 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW**