



Agència  
per a la Qualitat  
del Sistema Universitari  
de **Catalunya**

# **FOLLOW UP REPORT, EXTERNAL REVIEW 2017**

Barcelona, June 2019

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## 1. PREAMBLE

In 2017, AQU Catalunya carried out the third external review process to formally demonstrate its compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines, 2015 (ESG), among other reasons.

AQU Catalunya chose the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) to coordinate the external visit, which took place from 5 to 8 February 2017 and was conducted by a panel of experts formed by:

- Pedro Teixeira, chair of the panel, appointed by ENQA and the European University Association (USA)
- Pieter-Jan Van de Velde, secretary of the panel, appointed by ENQA
- Karena Magure, appointed by ENQA
- Adrian Stan, appointed by the European Student Union (ESU)

On 2 June 2019, the external committee issued the report ENQA Agency Review: Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya). Also, on 14 July the same year, the president of the ENQA formally notified AQU Catalunya that “*The Board of ENQA agreed to reconfirm the AQU Catalunya membership of ENQA for five years from that date (21.06.2017)*”.

Some months later, on 21 November the Register Committee of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) informed AQU Catalunya about the “*Approval of the Application by AQU Catalunya for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register valid until 30.06.2022*”.

On 14 September 2017, AQU Catalunya addressed a consideration to the ENQA president in relation to the external assessment process carried out in order to appeal against both the recommendations made and the results the Catalan agency obtained. The response came on 26 February 2018. The Board of ENQA carefully analysed the scrutiny of AQU Catalunya’s review report in more detail and provided its consideration regarding the panel’s judgements being overly strict or overly lenient in light of the evidence submitted.

Despite taking into consideration the recommendations from both ENQA and EQAR in its external assessment activities upon being notified, AQU Catalunya did not make a profound assessment of the result or draw up the Action Plan until the external assessment process concluded in February 2018.

## 2. PREPARATION OF THE 2019-2022 ACTION PLAN

Once all the information was available, AQU Catalunya began a project to analyse the recommendations issued in order to draw up the Action Plan.

The project was set up in early 2018 and the project team was formed by the heads of all the departments of AQU Catalunya, the legal advisor, and the project manager and head of internal quality assurance. The project is divided into different phases:

Phase	Calendar	Action	Status
1	May '18 — February '19	Recommendation analysis and preparation of the 2019-2022 Action Plan	Finished
2	February — June '19	Preparation of the follow-up report	Finished
3	March '19 — June '22	Implementation of the 2019-2022 Action Plan	Ongoing
4	September '20 — July '21	Internal assessment process	—
5	September '21 — June '22	External assessment process	—

In order to carry out the first phase, the project team set up 14 internal working groups to analyse the recommendations of each standard (see Annex 1). Each group proposed different actions that were reviewed by the project team, and they were subsequently approved by the director of AQU Catalunya.

With this follow up report AQU Catalunya finishes the second phase and now is focused in the third one: Implementation of the 2019-2022 Action Plan.

## 3. IMPLEMENTATION

The 2019-2022 Action Plan contains 25 actions, but in two cases AQU Catalunya considers that the recommendation is not suitable. So the status of the actions as at June 2019 is as follows:

Action status	Situation as at June 2019	%
Complete	10	43%
Ongoing	8	35%
Pending	5	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 4. 2019-2022 ACTION PLAN

ESG: standard; R/S: recommendation or suggestion; N: action number; Action: the action approved by AQU Catalunya; Execution schedule; Implementation status; Comments from AQU Catalunya.

### ACTION PLAN 2019-2022

ESG	R/S	Recommendation	N.	Action	Person in charge	2019	2020	2021	2022	State	Comments
						Execution schedule					
2.1.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends the agency to reflect on how the concept of student-centred learning may become a core element in the agency's work and in its procedures (ESG 1.3).	1	AQU Catalunya's Student Advisory Committee is designing the "students report" that will be an evidence for the institutional report assessment.	Head Quality Assessment Department	X				Ongoing action	AQU Catalunya would point out that this concept is included in all the methodologies, but with the purpose of make it clearer, will introduce some actions.
2.1.	R		2	Once the "students report" is approved, AQU Catalunya will review all the guidebooks to introduce it.			X			Pending action	
2.1.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency integrates student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4) more consistently into the different evaluation procedures.	3	AQU Catalunya will review the guidebooks to include an explanation and an evidence table to make it clearer.	Head Quality Assessment Department		X			Ongoing action	The review of the evaluation guides (ex-ante accreditation and Acreditación) should include a specific reference "cicles formatius". At the Accreditation Guide at "1.3" submission and 6.3 to how verify the impact.
2.2.	S	ENQA Supplementary recommendation according to ENQA Board 26.02.2018: The panel recommends the agency develops a clear vision on how the external quality assurance system in Catalonia should be designed in order to make it even more fit for purpose.	4	The recommendation can not be fulfilled.						Closed	AQU Catalunya has limited possibilities to influence the decisions at a National level. However, the methodologies designed by AQU Catalunya are aligned with the purpose and objectives of its review activities.
2.3.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends, from a developmental approach, the strengthening of follow-up procedures, especially vis-à-vis the strategic purpose of strengthening institutional enhancement.	5	To strengthen the follow up process, AQU continues the monitoring process of the VSMA Framework (that guarantees a proper monitoring both at the institutional level —Faculty— and at the degree programme level); and besides AQU is consolidating in 2019 the Certification programme for IQAs Implementation, that certifies that the system has been implemented and is operative in the faculty responsible for running the programmes covered by the IQAs and that it is appropriate for the programme's quality assurance.	Head Quality Assessment Department	X				Ongoing action	<a href="http://www.aqu.cat/universitats/certificaci osgiq/index_en.html">http://www.aqu.cat/universitats/certificaci osgiq/index_en.html</a>

ESG	R/S	Recommendation	N.	Action	Person in charge	Execution schedule				State	Comments
2.4.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends to further strengthen the efforts to involve foreign experts, including students, in the quality assurance procedures in order to increase both the independence and the international input in the procedures	6	Sign a Memorandum of understanding between ESU and AQU Catalunya concerning student experts participation in AQU's quality assurance external evaluations.	AQU's secretary	X				Ongoing action	AQU Catalunya is reviewing the Memorandum.
2.4.	R		7	Taking into account the typology of the external visits to be carried out in accordance with the annual plan, AQU Catalunya will increase the number of the experts outside from Catalunya in the following years: 2018: Catalan 29%; Spanish 67%, International 4%.	Head Quality Assessment Department				X	Ongoing action	It is relevant to point out that the Catalan Higher Education System function independently of the Spanish one. Being Spain the only European country with an important pool of Spanish speakers, it is natural that AQU Catalunya looks for Spanish experts.
2.4.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency guarantees that all reviewers and experts are trained regularly in order to keep them up-to-date on the procedures, the reasoning behind those procedures, and the values and concepts underpinning the 2015 ESG	8	Elaborate an experts training plan in order to keep them up-to-date: A- Strengthen the training of the pannel secretaries B- Ensure that all experts have received updated training in a maximum of 5 years. C- Update the webpage of Training of external experts, as a support tool and to inform them of the most relevant changes in the methodology. D- Use of the surveys to figure out the lacking of training in the areas of quality assurance.	Head Quality Assessment Department	X	X			Ongoing action	A part from the normal training sessions, in 2018, AQU Catalunya carried out a specific training of the pannel secretaries, to strengthen their role.
2.5.		ENQA strength points: the result of the panel assessment "Fully compliant"	9	Maintain procedures, especially: A- Design guidebooks with clear information about the scope of the review and the criteria being used B- To publish the methodology at the appropriate time in different languages C- To train the experts properly through workshops, training sessions, webinars, etc.	Head Quality Assessment Department					Done	
2.5.			10	Finish the meta-evaluation report of the Accreditation process 2014-2017, and elaborate in 2022 the next one.	Head Quality Assessment Department	X			X	Ongoing action	Pending approval (July 2019) by Institutional and Programme Review Commission
2.5.			11	Include in the next AQU Catalunya self-Assesment report, if relevant: A- During the external review process, the universities have the opportunity to correct factual errors in the external reviews reports B- The elaboration of meta-evaluations reports contribute to ensuring the consistency of judgments in the evaluation process.	AQU's secretary				X	Pending action	

ESG	R/S	Recommendation	N.	Action	Person in charge	Execution schedule				State	Comments
2.6.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends the agency should publish all reports, including the ex-ante accreditation reports on programmes that have not been successful. EQAR: While the Register Committee acknowledged AQU's efforts to improve the readability and accessibility of reports for its target audience the Committee concluded that the fag has only been partially addressed, since AQU still does not publish all reports. The Committee was thus unable to concur with the review panel's conclusion of (substantially) compliance and considered that AQU complies only partially with ESG 2.6.	12	AQU Catalunya publish, at EUCInformes website (estudis.aqu.cat/informes), the non-positive ex-ante accreditation reports issued from January 2019, with a prior warning that will explain that the program does not exist. So, all the reports issued by AQU Catalunya are public.	AQU's secretary		X			Done	<u>Example:</u> <a href="http://estudis.aqu.cat/informes/Web/Centre/Detail?centred=1169#">http://estudis.aqu.cat/informes/Web/Centre/Detail?centred=1169#</a>
2.6.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends the agency offers all available information in a more integrated way, making both quantitative and qualitative data easily accessible and comparable for all stakeholders, including students and employers.	13	To include in the Strategic Plan 2019-2022 AQU Catalunya commitment with the integration of data.	Head of Internationalisation and Knowledge Generation Department		X			Done	In the last decade, AQU Catalunya has done significant efforts to provide a lot of information public and to bring together data from different sources. The result are webpages as: estudis.aqu.cat, estudis.aqu.cat/dades and winddat.aqu.cat. The Strategic Plan 2019-2022 has been approved by the Governing body the 2 of May 2019, and continues the commitment with the integration of data. One of the strategic lines of the Strategic Plan 2019-2022 is to facilitate the access to quantitative and qualitative data, in an integrated way, to improve the quality of the Catalan university system. AQU Catalunya will implement the five strategic actions that are included in this strategic line, from the following years.

ESG	R/S	Recommendation	N.	Action	Person in charge	Execution schedule				State	Comments
2.7.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency reconsiders the composition of the Appeals Committee in order to fully exclude the risk of any perception of a lack of independence, notably by extending its composition by the inclusion of some non-Catalan members .	14	Increase the composition of the Appeals Committee with two new non-Catalan members.	Legal advisor		X			Ongoing action	AQU Catalunya is designing the increase of this Commission, from 3 to 5 members. The objective is that the new composition will begin in 2020.
3.1.	S	ENQA Suggestion according to ENQA Board 26.02.2018: The panel recommends that the agency further reflects on the balance between external and internal quality assurance, provided the agency wants to move towards an external quality assurance system which is fundamentally based on institutional accreditation.	15	The Governing Board approved in 2018 the Catalogue of services. This Catalogue gather the principles, the services and commitments of AQU Catalunya. This document briefly explains the services in the fields of: Programme and institutional review, Quality assurance of teaching staff in higher education, knowledge generation, and Internationalization. The Catalogue of services is available at the webpage of AQU Catalunya	AQU's secretary					Done	<a href="http://www.aqu.cat/aqu/activitats_en.html#a1">http://www.aqu.cat/aqu/activitats_en.html#a1</a>
3.1.	R	EQAR: The Register Committee concurred with the panel that such consultancy activities should be clearly separated from external QA activities, in particular when those activities are carried out for the same higher education institution. The Committee drew AQU's attention to the guiding principles set out in Annex 5 to the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG and underlined that AQU is expected to make a substantive change report should it resume the same or similar consultancy-type activities offered to higher education institutions.	16	To elaborate and approve The Catalogue of services. This Catalogue has to gather the principles, the services and commitments of AQU Catalunya.	AQU's secretary					Done	The Governing Board approved in 2018 the Catalogue of services. The services offered does not include the activity of consultancy. The Catalogue of services is available at the webpage of AQU Catalunya:  <a href="http://www.aqu.cat/aqu/activitats_en.html#a1">http://www.aqu.cat/aqu/activitats_en.html#a1</a>

ESG	R/S	Recommendation	N.	Action	Person in charge	Execution schedule				State	Comments
3.3.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency considers the implications of the close involvement of active HEI representatives in the work of the agency. In particular the impact upon the independence compared to the involvement of more neutral but equally competent stakeholders from other jurisdictions.	17	The recommendation can not be fulfilled.						Closed	The opinion made by the pannel in the external report seems different than the EQAR Register Committee (2017-11-21) and the ENQA Board (2018-02-26). AQU Catalunya fully agrees with the last one. The Catalan Agency believes that the weakness that could question its independence in the past had already been solved. And the separation of functions does not allow any interference between governing and assessing bodies. Besides, to change the composition of the Governing Board it is necessary to change the law, which at this moment AQU Catalunya consider not suitable.
3.3.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends that the agency takes steps to fully separate the roles of the definition and monitoring of procedures on the one hand, and the implementation of those procedures on the other hand. EQAR: The Register Committee noted the agency's clarifications. While it found that the flag on the independence of the Governing Board was largely addressed, the Committee underlined the concerns of the panel with regard to the overlap in the composition of the agency's different bodies. The Committee therefore could not follow the panel's conclusion of compliance and considered that AQU complies only partially with ESG 3.3.	18	Not appoint any president or member of the Institutional and Programme Review Comission (CAIP) among the members of the technical committees.	Head Quality Assessment Department		X			Done	Since the beginning of 2019, AQU Catalunya has not appointed any president or member of the CAIP among the members of the technical committees. So, there has not been any overlap in the composition of the agency's different bodies.

ESG	R/S	Recommendation	N.	Action	Person in charge	Execution schedule				State	Comments
3.4.	S	ENQA Suggestion according to ENQA Board 26.02.2018: The panel recommends that the agency structurally embeds the practice of the publication of thematic analyses in its work programme, providing overview reports which bring together the results of its quality assurance processes and its other activities in order to inform the higher education sector and broader society.	19	Safeguard and improve quality of Catalan University System, AQU Catalunya will maintain: A- The publication of Cross-sectional reports (minimum one each year) B- The universities report, addressed to the rectors (one per university/every three years) C- The Centers reports (private reports) D- The publication of the results from surveys (graduate employment outcomes, employers survey, Bachelor and Master's graduate satisfaction survey) F- The publication of comparative data in euc.estudis.cat/dades G- The publication of meta-evaluation reports	Head of Internationalisation and Knowledge Generation Department and Head Quality Assessment Department					Done	According to the proposal of Ms Klemencic in a CHEA conference (2017): <i>National accrediting and quality assurance bodies should serve as repositories of all key data, information and research on their respective higher education systems</i> , we believe that benchmarking indicators is the key to improvement. We strive to ensure that HEIs have evidences to support their evaluative reports. To this end, AQU gathers evidence coming from different procedures (external assessments, surveys, administrative data), and offers it to the Catalan HE system in different forms.
3.5.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends the agency better aligns the size of its team with the number of planned activities, in order to reduce the pressure on the staff to a level which is sustainable for the long term.	20	Establish the Contract Programme with the Catalan Administration. This agreement will balance the volume of activities with the financial and human resources. This action is included in the Strategic Plan 2019-2022.	AQU's secretary			X		Pending action	The Catalan Administration is the responsible to start the preparation of the Contract Programme.
3.5.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends the agency invests enough staff time to allow for more strategic thinking, and preparation for the cultural shift which will be needed for a new approach to what is currently understood as internal and external quality assurance, if the tendency towards institutional accreditation is progressed.	21	In the Annual Action Plan, AQU Catalunya quantifies the number of activities, and its volume, that can be done by the staff during the year.	AQU's secretary	X				Done	The Action Plan 2019 has changed its direction in comparison with the previous ones, the new Action Plan quantifies the volume of activities that can be assumed by the staff, in order to invest the staff time.  As example: In the 2019 Plan appears the maximum number of assessments that AQU will carry out. Specifically, 133 external visits for evaluation programmes and 20 external visits to the certification of Internal Quality Assurance System, the first step to the institutional accreditation.
3.5.	R		22	Once the Contract Programme is approved, to distribute the activities in a four year term.	AQU's secretary				X	Pending action	In order to plan the staff time in a medium term.

ESG	R/S	Recommendation	N.	Action	Person in charge	Execution schedule				State	Comments
3.5.	R	ENQA: The panel recommends a more strategic approach towards the composition of the AQU team, which will improve the cooperation among departments, enhance staff development and training.	23	Introduce the new Training programme skills-based.	Head of Administration	X				Done	This new plan is based on, among others references, ENQA document <i>Quality assurance professional competencies framework</i> (2016)
3.5.	R		24	Establish the strategic staff training yearly.	Internal Coordination Committee	X				Done	The Internal Coordination Committee established in 2019 three objectives: 1. Organise stays to other european agencies, to get references and best practices 2. Strengthen training in institutional accreditation 3. Strengthen training in data, indicators, statistical language and associated tools
3.5.	R		25	Include in the next AQU Catalunya self-Assesment report, if relevant, a better explanation of the Training programme.	AQU's secretary				X	Pending action	

## 5. ANNEX 1: WORKING GROUPS

	2.1. Consideration of internal quality assurance	2.2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose	2.3. Implementing processes	2.4. Peer-review experts	2.5. Criteria for outcomes	2.6. Reporting	2.7. Complaints and appeals	3.1. Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance	3.2. Official status	3.3. Independence	3.4. Thematic analysis	3.5. Resources	3.6. Internal quality assurance and professional conduct	3.7. Cyclical external review of agencies
RESULT	SUBSTANTIALLY	SUBSTANTIALLY	FULLY	SUBSTANTIALLY	FULLY	SUBSTANTIALLY	FULLY	SUBSTANTIALLY	FULLY	SUBSTANTIALLY	SUBSTANTIALLY	SUBSTANTIALLY	FULLY	FULLY
Person in charge	Catl Cazalla	Carme Edo	Conchita Herrero	Esteve Arboix	Esther Huertas	Albert Basart	Jordi Escolar	Núria Comet	Jordi Escolar	Maria Giné	Anna Prades	Maria Giné	Núria Comet	Núria Comet
Member	Josep M. Torres	Josep M. Torres	Josep M. Torres	Josep M. Torres	Josep M. Torres	Josep M. Torres	Josep M. Torres	Josep M. Torres	Maria Giné	Josep M. Torres	Josep M. Torres	Esteve Arboix	Jordi Escolar	Jordi Escolar
Member	Esteve Arboix	Esteve Arboix	Esteve Arboix	David Gassiot	Esteve Arboix	Núria Comet	David Gassiot	David Gassiot	Carme Pérez	Jordi Escolar	David Gassiot	David Gassiot	David Gassiot	David Gassiot
Member		Jordi Escolar		Núria Comet		Maria Giné	Esteve Arboix	Maria Giné		Núria Comet	Maria Giné	Núria Comet	Maria Giné	Maria Giné
Member				Eva Benito		Agata Segura	Noèlia Grifo	Carme Pérez			Maribel Quiros	Carme Pérez	Carme Pérez	Carme Pérez
Member				Béatrice Joanny				Esther Huertas			Dani Torrents			