

ENQA AGENCY REVIEW

# VALENCIAN AGENCY FOR ASSESSMENT AND FORECASTING (AVAP)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the conclusions of the review of the Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting (AVAP) coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

AVAP holds the main responsibility for external quality assurance processes in the Valencian region and is currently operating exclusively in Valencia. The setup of the external quality assurance system in Spain includes a national agency and a separate agency for the majority of the autonomous regions. The role of regional agencies has been gradually strengthened by changes in the national regulations, at the same time requiring the regional agencies to be registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) in order to perform certain tasks, for example, the institutional evaluation.

AVAP was established in 2006, and the decision to apply for ENQA membership and EQAR registration was taken in 2019. This decision was followed by a number of structural and organisational changes in order to comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The review panel learned that most of the changes related to ensuring compliance with the ESG have taken place starting from 2019 and some are still in progress.

As this was the first review of AVAP against the ESG, the review panel has analysed whether AVAP meets the requirements set by ESG and has formulated a number of recommendations for improvements that should be made in order to comply with the ESG fully.

AVAP is an agency that operates in a closed community and has not yet been exposed to regular international cooperation with quality assurance agencies outside Spain. The information on topical issues has been usually received through the Spanish Network of University Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU) and the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA). This setup has had a certain limiting impact on the self-confidence of the agency and on its approach to interpretation of the ESG.

The Terms of Reference for this review included the following activities:

- Authorization of new programmes (with the verification phase to be performed by AVAP after its registration on EQAR);
- Follow up of study programmes;
- Study programmes certification renewal;
- Support Programme for the Evaluation of Teaching Activities (DOCENTIA);
- Evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions (to be performed by AVAP after its registration on EQAR).

ENQA membership and EQAR registration will be an important milestone in AVAP's development and bring a number of new possibilities but also challenges, namely, the responsibility for new activities or increased responsibilities for current activities, increase in staff and need for a more formalised and transparent approach to different processes. AVAP is enjoying extensive support by the Valencian government in terms of resources but there are a number of organisational and structural challenges that will need to be overcome.

The review panel has primarily focused on AVAP's performance at the time of the review but also analysed the AVAP's interpretation of the ESG standards in light of the new activities to be performed

by AVAP in the future and the upcoming organisational changes, i.e. increase in funding and recruitment of additional staff.

As a result, the review panel came to a conclusion that AVAP is fully compliant with ESG 3.2, 3.7, 2.1, substantially compliant with ESG 3.1, 3.5, 3.6, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6 and partially compliant with ESG 3.3, 3.4, 2.4, 2.7.

The review panel concludes that overall AVAP is in substantial compliance with the ESG.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting (Agència Valenciana d'Avaluació i Prospectiva, AVAP) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. It is based on an external review conducted in February 2022 to May 2022.

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

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is AVAP's first external review, the panel was expected to pay particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place, being aware that full evidence of concrete results in all areas may not be available at this stage. However, it has to be taken into account that AVAP has been in operation since 2006.

### REVIEW PROCESS

The 2022 external review of AVAP 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. The panel for the external review of AVAP was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Achim Hopbach (Chair), Higher Education Consultant, former Managing Director at Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), Austria (ENQA nominee);
- Asnate Kažoka (Secretary), Head of Development and International Cooperation Unit, Academic Information Centre (AIC), Latvia (ENQA nominee);
- Marisol Morales-Ladrón, Full professor in English and Irish studies, Vice-President for Quality Management, University of Alcalá, Spain (EUA nominee);
- Leander Gussmann, Ph.D. Student in Cultural Studies, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria, (ESU nominee, member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool)

The review panel was supported by Milja Homan, ENQA's Project and Reviews Officer.

The review panel would like to express sincere gratitude to the AVAP staff and especially to the liaison person Sol Rodrigo for their welcoming attitude and willingness to accommodate all requests by the review panel.

The review panel would also like to thank Milja Homan, the review coordinator for this review, for her continuous support throughout the review process. Her support was invaluable in liaising with EQAR and ensuring the consistency of the judgements made by the review panel.

The original Terms of Reference for this review included the following activities:

- Evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions;
- Authorization of new programmes;
- Follow up of study programmes;
- Study programmes certification renewal.

During the review process the Terms of Reference were amended to include also the support programme for the evaluation of teaching activities (DOCENTIA). The amendment was made at a rather late stage of the review but the review panel confirms that it was able to request and receive the information necessary for evaluating this activity.

During the review the panel learned that AVAP has currently fully implemented methodologies for authorization of new programmes (excluding the verification phase), follow up of study programmes and study programmes certification renewal.

It was explained that AVAP has not developed nor implemented methodologies for evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions and for the verification phase of the authorization of new programmes due to the fact that it is not yet eligible to perform these procedures under the Spanish legislation.

As after registration on EQAR, AVAP would become eligible to do the evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions as well as the verification phase of the authorization of new programmes, the review panel performed the assessment of these procedures to the extent it was possible given the fact that these procedures are not implemented yet. This is also reflected in other sections of the review report.

The primary sources of evidence used by the review panel were the SAR, the interviews conducted during the site visit and the AVAP website. Due to a number of unclear issues in the SAR, the review panel also requested a significant number of additional documents to AVAP.

### **Self-assessment report**

The SAR was produced by an internal working group established in October 2020. The internal working group was supported by an external advisory team comprising various quality assurance experts.

The SAR included detailed information on the higher education system in the Valencia region and provided analysis on AVAP's compliance with the ESG Parts 2 and 3. While the volume of SAR was extensive, the review panel found the SAR rather descriptive and lacking specific evidence for a number of actions stated by AVAP and also challenging to navigate when searching for specific evidence. Also, based on the information presented in the SAR, the review panel found it difficult to differentiate between the different quality assurance procedures and the stakeholders involved. When presenting the evidence for the ESG Part 2, AVAP often referred to one assessment procedure only (certification renewal) but without clearly specifying that and without explaining the differences for other procedures. Another issue encountered by the review panel was the inconsistent use of terminology throughout the SAR that was caused by translation and interpretation issues (commission instead of expert group, use of commission and committee and director and directorate at the same time, use of complaints instead of appeals etc.). The review panel understands that AVAP currently operates only in a Spanish speaking environment and at this stage the English translations could have been produced exclusively for the use of the review panel, ENQA and EQAR. However, consistent use of terminology already at this stage would spare AVAP from additional questioning during the different review stages and in the long-term perspective would be crucial for any operations abroad.

The circumstances described above resulted in a considerable number of additional material that was requested to AVAP both before and during the site visit and also in extra effort that was put in verifying each new evidence against the ones provided previously.

The review panel, however, would like to state that the set of information gathered by the review panel by the end of the site visit was sufficient to perform a review against the ESG.

As the review panel included a native Spanish speaker, it was agreed that extensive and detailed additional information should be requested in Spanish rather than asking for a translation, for example, the meeting minutes of the governing bodies, quality handbook etc. The presence of a Spanish speaker in the review panel was also important when dealing with inconsistent or inaccurate translation in the SAR or during the visit.

### **Site visit**

The site visit took place on 9 – 11 February 2022. On 24 January 2022, the review panel used the opportunity to have a meeting with AVAP's resource person, namely with three senior staff members.

Due to the ongoing pandemic situation, it was agreed by the review panel, ENQA and AVAP to hold this site visit on-line. The review panel would like to state that the on-line mode of the site visit did not affect the planned agenda of the visit and the review panel was able to execute all interviews as planned. However, the review panel considers that for the first review of an agency it would have been preferable to have an on-site visit in order to transfer the spirit of an external peer review.

During the site visit the review panel met representatives of the following groups:

- AVAP's management;
- AVAP's staff;
- Team responsible for preparing the SAR;
- Executive Committee and Steering Committee;
- Advisory Board;
- Regional Government and Regional Secretariat of Higher Education;
- Permanent decision-making committees (Authorisation Evaluation Committee, Follow-up Evaluation Committee, Accreditation Commission);
- Higher education institutions reviewed by AVAP;
- External evaluators;
- Students' Committee;
- Guarantee's Commission;
- Other stakeholders.

The majority of participants used the possibility of simultaneous interpretation throughout the visit. The full list of interviewees can be found in the Annex I of the report.

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

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

AVAP operates in the Valencian community which is one of the 17 Autonomous Communities established in Spain. According to the Spanish Constitution, the responsibility for education in Spain is divided between the State and the Autonomous Communities. The overall organisation of the university system in Spain is established by a Royal Decree 822/2021 that was approved on 28 September 2021.

The Valencian community consists of three provinces – Castellón, Valencia and Alicante – with the capital Valencia.

There are nine universities (five public and four private) in the Valencian community. The universities are divided in public and private based on the source of funding and the impact of the State on the overall organisation of the university. Each university can have its main campus and also one or several affiliated centres. All public universities in the Valencian community have affiliated centres.

According to the SAR, the university system in the Valencian community is the fourth largest in Spain in terms of total enrolments and graduates, teaching and research staff.

The universities are able to offer both official degree programmes that have to be verified and accredited and non-official degree programmes that can be designed autonomously by each university.

The higher education studies in the Valencian community and Spain overall are structured according to the Bologna principles and consist of three cycles (bachelor, master and PhD studies).

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

The external quality assurance system for higher education in the Valencian community was created in 2002 with three critical stakeholders: (1) the Valencian Council of Universities, (2) the Valencian Commission for Accreditation and (3) Quality Assessment in the Valencian University System (CVAEC) which assumed the function of autonomous external quality assurance body.

Since 2006 the responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in the Valencian community lies with the Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting (AVAP). The establishment of AVAP was led by the need for a more flexible organisation model for quality assurance and the examples shown by other autonomous communities in Spain.

AVAP is a key player in the higher education sector in the Valencian community and has a tight relationship with the Regional Council for Innovation, Universities, Science and Digital Society.

In total there are ten regional quality assurance agencies in Spain and the national agency - National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA). Currently eight Spanish agencies, including ANECA, are registered on EQAR.

In pursuant to article 25.2 of the Royal decree 822/2021 only evaluation agencies that are listed on EQAR are eligible to perform assessment and accreditation of university institutions and to issue the verification report for authorization of new programmes. The regional agencies that are not yet listed on EQAR have to cooperate with ANECA in conducting the assessment procedures, for example, in order for ANECA to perform the verification phase.

All Spanish quality assurance agencies, including the agency in the Valencian community, are members of the Spanish Network of University Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU) which serves as a platform for information exchange and collaboration.

## **VALENCIAN AGENCY FOR ASSESSMENT AND FORECASTING**

The Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting (AVAP) was established in 2006 by Law 5/2006 of the Valencian Government with the aim to guarantee the quality and excellence of the Valencian higher education system, innovation and public services through consultancy and foresight.

According to the Law of Public Finance of the Valencian Government, AVAP is a public law entity subject to private law. The SAR states that AVAP is an autonomous and independent body, with its own legal personality and assets and full capacity to act to fulfil its purposes

Through its organisational structure, AVAP is attached to the Regional Council for Innovation, Universities, Science and Digital Society.

AVAP has been an affiliate of ENQA since 2016 and is currently applying for the ENQA membership and EQAR registration for the first time.

In the self-assessment report (SAR), AVAP states that the main activities related to the self-assessment process were started in 2019 when changes in the governance and a number of strategic changes took place in AVAP, including the decision to apply for ENQA membership and EQAR registration.

In September 2020 a designated staff member - Head of Internationalisation & Coordination Unit - was employed for managing the process of ENQA membership application.

## AVAP'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

AVAP is governed by a Steering Committee that can act both as a Plenary (Steering) Committee and as an Executive Committee.

The Steering Committee consists of 16 members – the President of AVAP, Head of the Regional Secretariat of Higher Education, Director of AVAP, six representatives of the social partners from the local community (one representative of higher education institutions, one representative of social councils of Valencian public universities, one business or professional representative, three experts recognised in the area of higher education, science, innovation or public services), six members from the Regional Government and one representative of the AVAP Student Committee.

The reduced Steering Committee that acts as the Executive Committee consists of the President of AVAP, Head of the Regional Secretariat of Higher Education, Director of AVAP and three representatives of the Regional Government.

The Head of the Regional Council for Innovation, Universities, Science and Digital Society is automatically also the President of AVAP and the Head of the Regional Secretariat of Higher Education is the Vice-president of AVAP.

The Director of AVAP leads the operational work of AVAP and is appointed by the Regional Government and approved by the Steering Committee.

AVAP also has an Advisory Board that is composed of national experts in areas related to the functioning of AVAP. The Advisory Board members are appointed by the AVAP's Director.

In addition, there is a Students' Committee composed of representatives of the students' representative bodies of all universities in the Valencian Community. The Students' Committee is chaired by AVAP's Director.

According to the 822/2021 Decree, AVAP is supposed to function in the following areas: Higher Education Quality Area, Area of Assessment of Scientific Research, Technological Development and Business Innovation, Prospective Area, Public Services Area. However, currently there are two areas:

Quality in Higher Education and Innovation Area and Management, Forecasting and Public Services Area. There are currently 16 staff members in AVAP.

There are currently the following permanent committees with decision-making powers in quality assurance procedures: Follow-up Committee (Follow-up Evaluation Committee) and Accreditation Commission and also an interim committee - Authorization (Degree) Evaluation Committee.

The Follow-up Committee (or Follow-up Evaluation Committee or Evaluation Commission or Assessment Committee) draws up the final report for the follow-up procedure. It consists of: a chairperson with an academic profile and experience in degree verification, authorisation, monitoring or accreditation processes; a variable number of academic members to be determined according to the number of degrees to be assessed and the heterogeneity of their academic field, with experience in processes of verification, authorisation, monitoring or accreditation of degrees; one student member, preferably from the academic field or branch of the degrees to be assessed, with training in assessment processes; one member with a technical profile, who shall have experience in the field of implementation and operation of quality assurance systems, university management or the European Higher Education Area; an AVAP technician, who acts as secretary, with the right to speak but not to vote.

There can be several Follow-up Committees at the same time. They are appointed by the AVAP Director on an annual basis because the call for follow-up procedures launched to the higher education institutions is annual. For the year 2021 three Follow-up Committees have been established: Legal and Social Sciences Committee, Engineering and Architecture Committee and Medical and Health Sciences Committee.

The Accreditation Commission draws up the final report for certification renewal procedure. It consists of: a chairperson with an academic profile and experience in degree verification, authorisation, monitoring or accreditation processes; a variable number of academic members, determined according to the number of degrees to be assessed and the heterogeneity of their academic field, with experience in degree verification, authorisation, monitoring or accreditation processes; a student member, trained in evaluation processes; a secretary with a technical profile attached to AVAP, with the right to speak but not to vote. The commission is appointed by the AVAP Director. Currently the Accreditation Commission consists of ten members including an AVAP staff member.

The Authorization (Degree) Evaluation Committee (or Evaluation Commission) draws up the final report for authorization of programmes. It is composed of: a chairperson with an academic profile and experience in degree verification, authorisation or monitoring processes; one academic member of recognised prestige per branch of knowledge (if the number of degrees to be introduced in a branch of knowledge is very high, the number of members may be increased); a student, preferably from the academic field or branch of the degrees to be evaluated, with training in evaluation processes and a secretary with a technical profile and attached to AVAP, with a voice but no vote in the Committee. The members of the Degree Evaluation Commission are appointed for a period of four years by the AVAP Director.

Once AVAP is listed on EQAR, the current Authorization (Degree) Evaluation Committee will be replaced by a Verification Committee.

In case of an appeal against the final resolution of an assessment process for study programmes certification renewal, an ad-hoc Guarantee's Commission is established.

Additionally, but outside the AVAP structure, there is the Council of Universities that issues the final resolutions for assessment processes and receives the appeals to the final outcome for study programme certification renewal. It is the regional body for academic coordination, as well as for cooperation, consultation and proposal in university matters. The Council of Universities is composed of the head of the Ministry responsible for university matters, Rectors of the universities and five members appointed by the President of the Council.

## AVAP'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

AVAP was established as the Agency for Assessment and Forecasting therefore its activities go beyond the quality assurance activities within the scope of ESG.

The AVAP's mission is to stimulate the excellence of the Valencian system of higher education, innovation, and public services, through evaluation and foresight and to improve the society it serves. This is achieved through the following functions:

- evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions, programmes, teaching staff and other related activities established by the Law of Universities and other legal regulations. However, due to the Spanish legal framework, AVAP would be eligible to perform evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions only after registration on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR);
- assessment of technological, business, research and developing projects;
- prospective and analysis of new technological, scientific and research activities to support higher education policies at the Valencian community;
- the evaluation and accreditation of the quality of university centres, their policies, and programmes.

As mentioned in the section on quality assurance in Valencian community, the EQAR registration is mandatory for performing assessment and accreditation of university institutions and issuing the verification report for new programmes. As a consequence, at the time of this review AVAP does not conduct accreditation of university institutions and, although it conducts the review procedure for authorization of new programmes, it does not take the final decisions and does not perform modification of study programmes requested by the universities. In these cases, the national evaluation agency ANECA will continue to be in charge until AVAP is listed on EQAR.

The following activities currently performed by AVAP have been defined as within the scope of the ESG and included in the Terms of Reference for this review:

The current **authorization procedure** is regulated by the Royal Decree 822/2021 and locally in the Valencian region by the Order 86/2010 of the Regional Council for Higher Education. The Order states the elements on which AVAP has to base its report. This report serves as the basis for a decision by the Regional Council. The latest protocol for authorization was approved in June 2021. First, the interim authorization report is issued and signed by the secretary of the evaluation committee, then the final authorization report is issued and signed by the AVAP Director. On the basis of this final report, the Director of ANECA would issue the verification decision.

The **follow-up procedure** is regulated by the Royal Decree 822/2021. The follow-up was not mandatory until October 2021. Now it is mandatory within three years after the verification and start of implementation of the programme and within three years after the renewal of the programme's accreditation. The procedure would highlight the aspects where special attention should be paid during

the next assessment. The follow-up procedure implemented by AVAP aims to promote a way of working in which the analysis of the situation and the implementation of measures for improvement are part of the daily procedure of the universities.

The **certification renewal** is regulated by the Royal Decree 822/2021. It takes place every six years or, in the case of bachelor programmes of more than 240 ECTS and up to 360 ECTS, every eight years. There is a protocol for assessment of bachelor and master's programmes and a different protocol for the assessment of PhD programmes. The last update of the methodology/protocol took place in 2021.

The **DOCENTIA** is implemented jointly by AVAP and ANECA according to the agreement signed in 2009 and renewed in 2021. According to this contract, the universities in the Valencian region will draw up their own model and procedure for assessing the teaching activity of their teaching staff and submit it to AVAP for assessment in the three different phases of the DOCENTIA programme - assessment of the model (design verification), certification of the implementation of the assessment model (certification) and monitoring of its implementation (monitoring of the certification). Overall, there are 6 phases of the DOCENTIA programme - design, design verification, follow-up of implementation, certification, monitoring of the certification, renewal of certification.

The **assessment of university institutions** is an alternative for programme evaluation and is regulated by the Royal Decree 640/2021. The methodology for evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions in Spain has been discussed within REACU and in 2020 a general protocol for the renewal of institutional accreditation of university institutions was approved by REACU. This assessment will focus on the effectiveness of the university's internal quality assurance system. An institution will be eligible to undergo this assessment if the initial accreditation of at least half of its official bachelor, master and PhD programmes has been renewed and the implementation of its internal quality assurance system has been certified. This assessment is aimed to take place every five years. As a result of this procedure AVAP would issue a report based on which the Council of Universities would issue the accreditation resolution. AVAP has not yet developed its own protocol for carrying out this procedure.

In addition to the activities mentioned above, AVAP performs the following activities:

- Evaluation of additional bonus for the teaching staff
- Evaluation of the teaching staff research activities
- Change of educational area for the teaching staff
- Evaluation for research & development actions and projects

AVAP's activities have been mainly focused on the Valencian region. AVAP has been an affiliate of ENQA since 2016 but international activities have been in the focus of AVAP only since 2020 when an Internationalization Unit was introduced in AVAP's structure. AVAP is currently involved in international initiatives as a member of the Spanish Network of University Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU). In the SAR AVAP has declared attendance of several webinars organised by other Spanish agencies and university alliances where Spanish universities take part. AVAP states in the SAR that one of its strategic objectives is to achieve greater international recognition.

## AVAP'S FUNDING

In accordance with Article 11 of the Law 5/2006 of the Valencian government, AVAP has the following resources:

- a) The corresponding allocations from the budgets of the government.

- b) Ordinary and extraordinary income generated by the exercise of its activities, as well as income from collaborating companies or entities which, in view of their knowledge, experience and recognized prestige, contribute to the aims attributed to the agency.
- c) The yield of the fees and public prices accrued in the exercise of their functions, in accordance with the provisions of the fourth additional provision of this legal text.
- d) The proceeds and income from its assets.
- e) The credits, loans, borrowings and other transactions it may enter into.
- f) Subsidies, inheritances, legacies, donations and any other voluntary contributions from public and private entities or bodies, and from individuals.
- g) Other income under public or private law to which it is entitled in accordance with the regulations in force.
- h) Any other resources that may be attributed to it.

In the period 2017 – 2021 AVAP's budget has increased and in 2021 constitutes approximately 1,5 million EUR. In the period from 2017 to 2020, the increase of the budget was mainly due to the increase of income from the assessment procedures. Starting from 2020 the increase has taken place on the basis of current grants and capital grants allocated to AVAP.

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF AVAP 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

The Regulations of the Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting (AVAP) adopted in 2013 (Annex 5) stipulate a wide array of functions of the agency. AVAP has a broad remit of responsibilities mainly in or at least linked to external quality assurance of higher education and research and innovation. The activities originally identified as within the scope of the ESG (cyclical accreditation of university institutions, authorization of new study programmes, follow-up of study programmes and study programme certification renewal) are complemented by another activity within the scope of the ESG, namely the support programme for the evaluation of teaching activities (DOCENTIA), which assesses the quality of university teaching staff and promotes their development and recognition. AVAP carries out DOCENTIA in collaboration with the national agency ANECA. Although there have been previous agreements, regional universities in the Valencian community use the DOCENTIA scheme mainly only from 2020, since it is not compulsory for universities under the Spanish legislation.

After being registered on EQAR AVAP will become eligible to perform:

- verification of new study programmes;
- modification of study programmes requested by the universities;
- evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions.

It is pursuant to article 25.2 of the Royal decree 822/2021 that only evaluation agencies that are included in EQAR are eligible to perform assessment and accreditation of university institutions and to issue the verification report for authorization of new programmes. As a consequence, at the point of the review AVAP does not conduct institutional accreditation and, although it conducts the review procedure for authorization of new programmes, it does not take the final decisions and does not perform modification of study programmes requested by the universities. In these cases, the national evaluation agency ANECA has been in charge and will be in charge until AVAP is listed on EQAR.

Since 2016 AVAP has conducted the following number of different assessment procedures (Table 1).

### Assessment procedures conducted by AVAP 2016 - 2021

Title of the procedure	Number of procedures conducted since 2016					
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Authorization of new programmes	34	25	35	23	20	34
Study programmes follow-up	49	84	117	62	-	35
Study programmes certification renewal	235	108	58	275	107	84

As for DOCENTIA, currently seven from nine universities in the Valencian region participate in the DOCENTIA programme. Three institutions have verified design, one has passed the pre-certification follow-up, one is certified, one is in the process of monitoring and one has the first monitoring carried out.

In January - July 2021 there has been one follow-up for 2014-2020 for one institution and three activities: analysis and assessment for the renewal of certification, certification of implementation (visit) and renewal of certification for another institution.

Mirroring its broad remit, AVAP defines its mission, which is published on the website, as “...to stimulate excellence in Valencian systems of higher education, innovation and public services, through evaluation and foresight, in order to improve the society it serves”.

In accordance with its vision “AVAP should be an internationally recognised agency for ensuring the quality of Valencian higher education systems, R&D&I and public services through the objective, sustainable and independent implementation of European and international procedures and standards. AVAP must generate relevant information on Valencian higher education systems, R&D&I and public services in order to become an irreplaceable point of reference for society and the Valencian government.”

AVAP gives its daily activities orientation through strategic plans. In its currently valid Strategic Plan 2020-2022 AVAP translates the mission into five strategic axes with 13 explicit strategic objectives and 45 concrete activities. The strategic objectives include among others:

- Encouraging student participation and involvement in AVAP activities;
- Strengthening the culture of quality in universities;
- To ensure and improve the quality of university degree evaluation processes;
- To ensure and improve the quality of teacher evaluation processes;
- To ensure and improve the quality of the evaluation processes for the creation, modification or suppression of university centres;
- To ensure and improve the quality of the evaluation processes for the creation, modification or suppression of university degrees.

The involvement of stakeholders in AVAP's governance and daily work is partly assured by legislation. As regards governance, the Steering Committee which is the collegiate governing and supervisory body of AVAP, includes representatives from universities, the Social Councils of the Valencian public universities, one business or professional representative, three experts of recognized prestige in higher

education, science, innovation or public services, members from regional government coming from the Regional Sub-Secretariat of higher education, the Regional Secretariat of public business sector, the Regional Director of higher education, the Regional Director of research & innovation, the Regional Director of innovation and the Regional Director of economy, and also the representative of the AVAP Student Committee. Stakeholders, namely representatives from universities in other regional communities in Spain, are also represented in the committees that are responsible for supervising the review procedures or for making decisions such as the Follow-Up Evaluation Committee, Accreditation Commission, Guarantee's Commission and an interim committee - Degree Evaluation Committee. Inclusion of a student member in these bodies is prescribed by the evaluation protocols. However, at the time of the site visit the composition of these committees as published on AVAP's website did not include student members. Furthermore, AVAP has established a Students' Committee with representatives from all the student bodies of the Valencian universities. The involvement of stakeholders is not limited to their representation in the Steering Committee, the Student's Committee, and the other decision-making committees. The review panel was informed during the site-visit that stakeholders, namely universities in the Valencian community are regularly consulted, for example when AVAP revises the protocols and guides for authorization, follow-up and certification of programmes. Another form of stakeholder involvement happens through the Advisory Board which consists of experts from the higher education research and innovation fields, complemented by experts from other quality assurance agencies. This body plays an important role in giving expert advice and raising new topics such as gender equality. AVAP uses this board also for receiving input to the development of the strategy.

The involvement of stakeholders, notably the students and labour market representatives in the review procedures is also guaranteed by the composition of the review panels; it will be further elaborated under standard 2.4.

## **Analysis**

With its four activities – authorization of new study programmes (partly implemented by AVAP, as the verification is performed by ANECA), follow-up of study programmes, study programme certification renewal, and DOCENTIA – AVAP regularly conducts external quality assurance procedures in the area of teaching and learning.

Based on its legal mandate AVAP is the main body responsible for external quality assurance in teaching and learning in the Valencian community. In the future, this will become even more relevant, when AVAP will take over those responsibilities that it cannot assume at the moment for legal reasons.

In the description of the methodologies of those activities within the scope of ESG AVAP makes explicit reference to ESG, which is clearly not done in the description of methodologies of the activities outside the scope of the ESG; this and the nature of the activities outside the scope of the ESG make the difference clear and transparent.

The review panel wants to congratulate AVAP for the broad support it enjoys from the stakeholders including the universities, students and the regional government in general, and also for the specific support for the decision to undergo the ENQA review and assume more decision-making responsibilities following a successful review. Stakeholders unanimously consider this step timely and necessary not only to lower universities' burden through concentration of responsibilities for external quality assurance with just one agency but also to strengthen AVAP's role in the higher education system. With regard to stakeholders the review panel concludes that there is a broad and well-established involvement in AVAP's governance and also in the daily operations such as the review panels. At the same time the review panel wants to note that stakeholder involvement in the activities

within the scope of the ESG is limited to national stakeholders. The review panel believes that AVAP would also benefit from including international stakeholders and/or experts as it would add a broader perspective to AVAP's currently very locally oriented activities. Another remark that the review panel would like to make is related to student involvement in decision-making bodies. While the evaluation protocols clearly foresee student involvement in all decision-making bodies, the composition of the bodies as announced on the AVAP website does not include any student members. The review panel urges AVAP to ensure actual student representation and also properly reflect it on the website.

The review panel wishes to emphasise that AVAP's role as the main quality assurance body in the field of higher education in the Valencian community is strengthened by its broad remit which also covers research and innovation and thus overcomes the artificial separation of quality assurance in teaching and learning from quality assurance in research. Furthermore, AVAP plays an important role with regard to future developments in higher education, research and development, as its remit also covers foresight regarding the whole system. The fifth strategic axis in AVAP's strategy "*prospective for the improvement of the university system, R&D system and public services in the Valencian community*" with its strategic objective "*To facilitate decision-making by the Valencian Government, the university system, the R&D&I system and public services by means of future scenarios*" demonstrates that the role of AVAP exceeds the one of an organiser of reviews in higher education.

As regards the strategic objectives and their translation into daily operations, it can be concluded that the five activities mentioned under the various strategic objectives demonstrate a close link to the legal tasks and the strategy of AVAP and thus offer good guidance for planning the daily operations and also for evaluating the direction of AVAP's activities.

AVAP's vision to be "*an internationally recognised agency for ensuring the quality of Valencian higher education systems, R&D&I and public services through the objective, sustainable and independent implementation of European and international procedures and standards*" with no doubt translates into the core strategic priority to become a full member of ENQA and be listed in EQAR.

#### **Panel commendation**

- I. AVAP is commended for the extensive support it receives from its stakeholders in order to become an ESG compliant agency and become a member of ENQA.

#### **Panel recommendation**

- I. The review panel recommends that AVAP ensures that student members are actually represented in all decision-making bodies and that the full composition of each decision-making body is properly reflected on the AVAP website.

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

- I. More international members could take part in the decisions of AVAP and as stakeholders in the governing bodies of the agency.

#### **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

AVAP was established by Law 5/2006 of the Valencian government as a public law entity subject to private law with the aim to guarantee the quality and excellence of the Valencian system of higher education, science and innovation through evaluation, accreditation and foresight.

In 2008 by the Decree 6/2008 AVAP's regulations were approved with the aim to provide AVAP with a flexible and autonomous operational and organisational structure.

The recently passed Royal Decree 822/2021 of September 2021 requires all regional Spanish agencies to become full members of ENQA and listed on EQAR, in order to implement the full portfolio of external quality assurance procedures foreseen in Spain.

## Analysis

AVAP operates exclusively in the Valencian community and has been recognised by the legal acts as the institution responsible for external quality assurance in the community. So far, part of its activities have been monitored by ANECA, which is the national agency that also operates at a regional level, providing support and assessment in smaller communities which only have one university and/or regions with no quality assurance body listed on EQAR.

During the site visit the review panel learned that there is a strong political will to support AVAP and that AVAP benefits from strong support by its stakeholders, including the regional government. The recognition of AVAP is also ensured by the setup of the Spanish higher education system where the responsibility for quality assurance of higher education is delegated to the autonomous communities and where it is expected that the quality assurance agency of each community eventually becomes a member of ENQA and registered on EQAR.

## 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

AVAP was established by Law 5/2006 as a public law entity subject to private law. The Law 5/2006 states that, in order to fulfil its aims and functions, AVAP shall act in accordance with the principles of independence, objectivity excellence and transparency.

### **Organisational independence**

AVAP is administratively attached to the Regional Council for Innovation, Universities, Science and the Digital Society. The regulations for AVAP are established by the Decree 6/2008 of the Council with further modifications by the Decree 116/2013.

AVAP is governed by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee can act as a Plenary Committee (Comité de Dirección/ Pleno) or as an Executive Committee (Comisión Ejecutiva).

The Plenary Committee consists of 16 members – the President of AVAP, Head of the Regional Secretariat of Higher Education, Director of AVAP, six representatives of social partners from the local community (one representative of higher education institutions, one representative of social councils of Valencian public universities, one business or professional representative, three experts recognised in the area of higher education, science, innovation or public services), six members from the Regional Government and one representative of the AVAP Student Committee. The position of the President of AVAP is held by the Head of the Regional Council for Innovation, Universities, Science and Digital Society and the position of the Vice-president by the Head of the Regional Secretariat of Higher Education. However, according to the Decree 6/2008, the Plenary Committee has to be made up of a maximum of 15 members and up to six members may be appointed from each of the social spheres and the government. In the case of members from the government, up to four members should be appointed according to the following order of precedence - the person who holds the undersecretary's position of the department to which the AVAP is attached, the person who holds the competent regional secretariat in matters of the public business sector, the persons holding the general directorates, or where appropriate the corresponding governing bodies, competent in higher education, science, business innovation, budgets and quality of public services. The Decree also states that the six representatives of social partners are appointed by the president of AVAP, at the proposal of AVAP's general management, assumingly the Director, for a period of two years.

According to the Decree 6/2008 of the Council, the President of AVAP establishes and chairs the meetings of the Plenary Committee (Comité de Dirección) and represents AVAP.

The Plenary Committee defines the general guidelines and lines of action of AVAP, approves, at the proposal of the Director of AVAP, the AVAP's annual plan of activities, approves and submits, to the assigned department, the preliminary draft of the AVAP budget, approves the staff, the functional organisation and the remuneration system for all AVAP's own personnel, reports the appointment and dismissal of the AVAP's Director. The Plenary Committee meets regularly, at least once a year.

The Executive Committee consists of the President of AVAP, Head of the Regional Secretariat of Higher Education, three representatives of the Regional Government and the Director of AVAP who will act as the secretary of the committee. The Decree states that the AVAP Director has to abstain from his right to vote in those matters in which his management is evaluated. According to the Decree, the Executive Committee has the functions attributed to it by the Steering Committee, to whom it reports on its activity. It meets at the request of the President or the majority of its members with the frequency necessary for the proper functioning of AVAP. It has the capacity to resolve appeals issued against any resolution passed by the Director by applying the appropriate law or regulation.

The Decree also states that, in the event that the AVAP's Director accumulates competences in two or more matters currently covered by the representatives of the government, the number of members who form the Plenary Committee and Executive Committee will be reduced in the same proportion.

During the review process the review panel did not receive any evidence of written bylaws for the Steering Committee or the Executive Committee, except for what has been defined by the Decree. Consequently, the review panel did not learn of any procedure for dismissing the other members of the Steering Committee or the Executive Committee, except the Director of AVAP. The review panel also did not learn of any defined terms of office for the Steering Committee and Executive Committee members, except the appointment of social partners for the term of two years.

The Director of AVAP leads the operational work of AVAP and assumes the full representation of the Steering Committee. The Director assumes the ordinary representation, administration and management of AVAP, directs the general operation of AVAP and its staff, executes the agreements

of the Steering Committee, prepares the annual plan of activities, the draft budget of the AVAP, signs contracts and agreements on behalf of AVAP. The Director of AVAP is also a member of the Steering Committee of the Regional Council for Innovation, Universities, Science and the Digital Society.

The SAR and the Law 5/2006 state that the Director (CEO) is appointed by the Steering Committee - “AVAP's Director is elected by AVAP's Steering Committee from among different candidates supported by their CVs”. The Decree 6/2008 of the Council, however, states that the AVAP's Director will be appointed and dismissed by Decree of the Council, at the proposal of the president of AVAP, after hearing the Steering Committee. While this information is not contradicting, it makes the review panel question the exact role of the President. The minutes of the Steering Committee meeting from 4/Sept 2019 state that the current Director of AVAP was proposed by the AVAP's President, without consideration of other options or any other discussion, and only the representatives of the Regional Government attended this meeting. As described above, the Director of AVAP is at the same time member of both the Plenary Committee and also the reduced Executive Committee and has voting rights in both bodies but has to abstain from voting in those matters in which his management is evaluated. The Director is appointed for a term of five years. The Decree states that the Steering Committee reports the approval and dismissal of the Director. However, the Steering Committee's responsibility for dismissing the Director is not stated clearly.

AVAP also has an Advisory Board that is composed of national and international experts in areas related to the functioning of AVAP. According to the SAR the Advisory Board members are appointed by AVAP's Director. According to the Decree 6/2008 of the Council the appointment of the Advisory Board corresponds to the Steering Committee.

In addition, there is a Students' Committee composed of representatives of all universities in the Valencian community. The Students' Committee is chaired by AVAP's Director.

The Decrees 6/2008 and 116/2013 of the Council often use the terms “general director” (el director general), “general management” (la dirección general), “presidency” (la presidencia) and “vice-presidency” (la vicepresidencia). Based on the other evidence, the review panel had assumed that “general director/ general management” is “director”, “presidency” is president and “vice-presidency” is vice-president. However, the review panel must note the loose use of terminology both in the decree and SAR is misleading.

### **Operational independence**

As mentioned earlier, under the section AVAP's Funding, the sources of income for AVAP are regulated and stabilised by Law 5/2016 (article 11). The main sources of income are the allocations from the government and the fees for AVAP's activities. The AVAP's Plenary Committee approves the preliminary draft of AVAP's budget and submits it to the government for further consideration as well as approves the statements of execution of the budget. The budget from the government is provided on a yearly basis as a lump sum without setting any restrictions for expenditure.

In the SAR, AVAP states that the common frame of reference for the assessment procedures, protocols and methodologies is established by the Spanish Network of University Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU). AVAP has the possibility to adapt them to the needs of the region and the protocols used by AVAP are adopted by the AVAP's Steering Committee.

The assessment methodologies used by AVAP are formally approved by the Steering Committee but there was no evidence of them being discussed by the Steering Committee. During the site visit AVAP

explained that in the Steering Committee only the issues related to resources and staff would be discussed but not issues related to quality assurance.

From the SAR and during the site visit the review panel learned about AVAP's plans to introduce a separate committee for methodologies that would be responsible for discussing the methodologies.

The assessments are performed by independent reviewers that are external to the Valencian higher education community and that are appointed by AVAP's Director.

As an institution attached to the Regional Council for Innovation, Universities, Science and Digital Society, AVAP is subject to the public employment policy. This means that AVAP is affected by restrictions on hiring new staff and maintaining the current staff and currently all AVAP staff members are public employees.

### ***Independence of formal outcomes***

AVAP has established the following decision-making bodies - Follow-Up Evaluation Committee (three committees for the year 2021), Accreditation Commission, Guarantee's Commission and an interim committee - Degree Evaluation Committee. The Follow-Up Evaluation Committee is established on an annual basis, the Degree Evaluation Committee is established for a period of four years, the Guarantee's Commission is established on an ad-hoc basis. The Accreditation Commission is a stand-alone body but the review panel did not find evidence of specific terms of office. Each of these bodies is responsible for decision-making in the relevant assessment procedures. The basic Rules of Procedure for each decision-making body are included in the protocol for the specific assessment procedure. However, the review panel did not learn of any specific written principles of their operation that would detail how the decisions are taken.

The decision-making bodies are approved by the AVAP Director but the review panel did not find evidence of any documented policy on how the members of these bodies would be selected. The review panel learned that the current members of these bodies were contacted informally by AVAP's staff and did not undergo any public application or selection procedure.

The decision-making bodies are composed according to a unified structure. They include representatives with academic background, student members and representatives with technical background. A distinctive feature of AVAP's operation is that all members of the decision-making bodies and all external evaluators have to be external to the Valencian higher education system and this is confirmed at their appointment.

The SAR and also the Decree 6/2008 refer to decision-making bodies as evaluation committees. According to the Decree 6/2008, the evaluation committees will be appointed, for an undetermined number of cases, by the President of AVAP, at the proposal of the general management, and their performance will be for four renewable years. The amended decree, however, includes contradicting information about the number - ten members according to the Decree 6/2008 and two members according to the Decree 116/2013. The decree states that to carry out each of the evaluation functions assigned to AVAP, evaluation committees will be established in each technical area, by fields of knowledge or specialties, made up of independent experts, who will intervene anonymously during the evaluation procedure and that, as a general rule, they will not carry out their activity in the Valencian Community.

For the preparation of reports and works derived from the functions entrusted to the AVAP, technical committees may be established made up of independent experts, appointed by the Presidency of the

AVAP, at the proposal of the general management of the Agency, and their actions will be linked to the duration of the project or work to be carried out.

The compensation for members of these bodies is set at the proposal of the Executive Committee, following a favourable report from the Ministry responsible for economics and finance.

### **Analysis**

During the site visit the review panel learned that the current composition of the governing bodies and management of the AVAP has been to a large extent established in 2019, following the changes in the regional government. The AVAP has been supported by the government since then but this has also created several risks for AVAP's operation.

### **Organisational independence**

In the Steering Committee, six of the 16 members are representatives of the Regional Government. From the discussions during the site visit the review panel learned that the Steering Committee meets twice a year and formally takes the internal decisions (approval of funding, assessment methodologies) but there is rarely any discussion on the essence of these decisions. The operative decisions are mainly taken by the reduced decision-making body – the Executive Committee – which consists of six members, three of them being the representatives of the Regional Government. In the opinion of the review panel, such strong representation of the Regional Government in the governance of AVAP poses a significant risk to the independence of the agency.

While it has been stated in the SAR that the Director of AVAP is appointed by the Steering Committee, during the site visit the panel learned that in fact the current Director was proposed by the Regional Government as the only candidate and that there was no open call for the position. The review panel did not learn of a public call for the position or a list of potential candidates that would have been discussed.

Both the Steering Committee and the Executive Committee include the Head of the Regional Council for Innovation, Universities, Science and Digital Society which serves as the President of AVAP.

Also, the review panel was concerned about the position of the Director within the AVAP. The fact that the director is a voting member of both the Steering Committee and Executive Committee but at the same time he is responsible for the execution of the decisions made by these committees and has to refrain from voting on those issues in which his management is being assessed, raises a question on whether there could be any issues not related to his management.

In addition to this, the AVAP Director has a strong formal position in the Advisory Board whose members are approved by the Director personally and he is also chairing AVAP's Students' Committee.

The review panel believes that this overall setup provides the Regional Government with too big influence in the governance of AVAP which does not support the notion of independence as stated in the ESG. The review panel acknowledges that the representation of the government in the governance structure is currently stipulated by law. So much the more it would be advisable to take action within AVAP's remit to counterbalance this influence or at least to take precautions to assure formalised and transparent decision-making by adopting written by-laws of the Steering Committee and the Executive Committee. Furthermore, the fact that the Director is personally involved in other collegiate bodies raises concerns with regard to independent decision-making of these bodies, also because the selection of the Director has proven to be not independent.

### ***Operational independence***

From the SAR and during the site visit the review panel learned that the assessment procedures performed by AVAP are based on the assessment performed by external evaluators and decisions are made by collegial decision-making bodies established by AVAP. The review experts involved in the assessment procedures are selected and appointed by the Director, from a pool of experts that have to apply in a public call and have to comply with criteria set up by the AVAP in the Protocol for selecting evaluators and advertised on AVAP's website.

The assessment procedures take place according to methodologies and protocols established by the Spanish Network of University Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU). In the SAR, AVAP claims that it has the autonomy to modify them according to their needs. However, during the site visit the review panel did not obtain unequivocal evidence that the modifications would be reviewed according to the needs of AVAP and the Valencian community, except the modification of application deadlines and other technical issues.

The review panel also learned about AVAP's plans to establish a separate committee for methodologies. While the review panel welcomes this initiative and agrees that there is definitely a need for a forum for discussing the methodologies, it also questions whether this is a well thought and needs-driven decision at this stage of development or rather a formal structure in order to comply with the ESG and the best practice in REACU, as the methodologies currently did not seem to be discussed at any other organisational structure of AVAP. The review panel would suggest making use of the currently established decision-making bodies and discussing each methodology in the related decision-making body. In the opinion of the review panel, this would also add to the consistency of decisions as currently the members of decision-making bodies did not seem to be briefed about consistency issues.

In this context the panel also wishes to emphasise that the dependence on the government funding as discussed under the standard 3.5 does not constitute a limitation to AVAP's independence. As mentioned above and explained later in the report, the government does not execute any micro steering but grants rather favourable lump sum budgets which do not provide the government with means to influence operations let alone decisions.

### ***Independence of formal outcomes***

The decisions are taken by the collegial bodies that are established by the Director of AVAP. The overall framework and composition for each body is set out in the protocol for the particular assessment.

However, after repeated requests, the review panel did not obtain evidence that there would be written Rules of Procedure for each of these bodies that would regulate the decision-making procedure and formally ensure that it is consistent and fully independent. Also, the review panel did not learn of any public and transparent procedure for appointing members of these bodies, except that they would be approved by AVAP's Director. The members of the bodies interviewed by the review panel were contacted informally by AVAP's staff and were not aware of any formal criteria or application procedures that they would need to follow in order to be selected.

Notwithstanding this, the panel found no evidence showing that the independence in decision-making would be compromised. As all these bodies are composed of individuals external to the Valencian higher education system, the independence from the higher education institutions under evaluation is fully ensured.

## Panel recommendations

1. The panel recommends AVAP to engage in a discussion with the Regional Government about the current state of organisational independence with a view to reduce the dominant role of the Government representatives in its governance notably the Executive Committee.
2. The panel recommends AVAP to revise the appointment procedure of the Director by the SC, in order to prove formal independence from the Regional government.
3. The panel recommends AVAP to approve Rules of Procedure for each managing and decision-making body that would regulate the decision-making procedure and formally ensure that it is consistent and fully independent
4. The panel recommends AVAP to develop and publish clear selection principles and application procedure for composing its collegial decision-making bodies, for example, the Accreditation Commission.

## Panel conclusion: partially compliant

## ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

## Evidence

AVAP's activities in the field of thematic analysis re-started in 2021 when REACU agreed to produce "structured analyses of the situation of the university system in certain areas, showing developments, trends, good practices and areas for improvement, with the aim of providing information to the universities themselves, public administrations and social agents for decision-making purposes". At the time of the site visit, AVAP had participated in three "thematic monographic sessions" in which other members of REACU presented analyses on topics such as employability in the fields of nursing and journalism and audiovisual communication.

According to the additional information submitted by AVAP, one more webinar was scheduled for the year 2022. Furthermore, as a part of the SAR, AVAP presented the report "*Empleabilidad de graduados y graduadas en la Comunidad Valenciana*" ("Employability of graduates in the Valencian Community") which was authored by a researcher on behalf of AVAP. This report compiles the universities' policies in this field together with indicators from the ministry.

During the site-visit the panel learned that AVAP had conducted meta-analyses of their review activities before the pandemic but discontinued this practice. To the surprise of the panel, these analyses were not retrievable because they were conducted under the previous AVAP's management and the webpage had been revamped, showing little information of reports of activities in the past. The panel also learned during the site-visit that internal and external stakeholders were aware of any activities in the field of thematic analyses only to a very limited extent.

## Analysis

The review panel agrees with the AVAP's statements in the SAR that there is a need for more efforts in this area.

However, AVAP's level of awareness of the requirements of the ESG 3.4 and the ability to relate it to the activities of AVAP is not clear. The review panel could not find out why the previous activities in thematic analyses were discontinued and whether the current AVAP management sees any links between these activities and the requirements of the ESG 3.4. Joining the activities of REACU in the field of exchanging information about thematic analyses can be considered as a good first step. However, it has to be noted that these activities are based on analyses conducted by other agencies. At the same time, the review panel wishes to emphasise that participation in the webinars is not an appropriate interpretation of the concept of "thematic analysis" and presentation of thematic analyses conducted by AVAP should be the next step. The review panel also wants to emphasise that thematic analyses are not an end in itself. They should inform higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders for their decision-making purposes and might also give the agency relevant information about the effectiveness of its operations. Therefore, communicating information and reports about thematic analyses is an important task. The fact that stakeholders are not aware of AVAP's activities in this field demonstrates that AVAP should put more effort into this. Communication should be also sought to identify relevant topics for thematic analyses. During the site-visit the review panel learned that there is no systematic process to identify topics neither within AVAP nor by involving external stakeholders.

The review panel also wants to emphasise that joint activities within REACU are relevant with regard to analysing outcomes of reviews or similar analyses at national level. In a country with the responsibilities for external quality assurance delegated to the regional level this might not only be relevant for the whole country but even more for each region so that the regional quality assurance agencies and authorities would have opportunities to compare the regional outcomes with outcomes at national level. An additional regional focus might provide AVAP with additional opportunities for analysis. However, thematic analyses at the national level should not be considered an alternative to thematic analyses at the regional level. AVAP as an agency with regional responsibility might wish to consider taking their regional mandate and the results from their own external reviews as basis for thematic analyses at the level of the Valencian region to be able to capture any regional specifics. The review panel felt reassured in this recommendation by the fact that within AVAP's remit is also the task "*Foresight and analysis of new technological, scientific and university demands of use to the Valencian Community*". Carrying out studies related to the future of the universities and regarding employability in the region constitutes an important role of the agency in the field of analyses which might be an excellent connecting point for thematic analyses. Both activities might inform and inspire each other. Hence AVAP might wish to consider integrating activities in thematic analyses and foresight to strengthen the regional focus of thematic analyses.

### **Panel recommendations**

1. The review panel recommends AVAP to strengthen its activities in REACU's joint thematic analyses by contributing AVAP's own reports and communicating their outcomes to AVAP's stakeholders.
2. The review panel recommends AVAP to (re)start thematic analyses at the regional level, to involve regional stakeholders in identifying relevant topics and to communicate the outcomes to them.
3. The review panel recommends AVAP to consider potentials of integrating thematic analyses and foresight activities.

**Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

## ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

### Evidence

AVAP has two main sources of income: recurrent funding from the government and fees from exercising the statutory functions or additional evaluation activities. AVAP has a budget which has grown almost continuously since 2017 and which amounts to approx. 1.6 million EUR in 2021 of which around 11% income is fee-based. The fee-based fraction varied between 10.6% and 33.4% during the last five years. In the financial year 2022 AVAP was granted an additional 200.000€ to start hiring more staff.

Budget negotiations follow the general procedure for public bodies; based on a proposal by AVAP the budget is negotiated on an annual basis and is agreed as a general budget. The review panel was informed during the site-visit that the last two budget proposals were accepted.

In its SWOT analysis, AVAP lists as a weakness the dependency on funding by the regional government. However, during the site-visit the review panel was informed that so far, no issues arose from this fact and that, on the contrary, AVAP benefits from generally big support by the government. Nevertheless, AVAP intends to create new streams of income through offering services to other regional bodies and abroad. Despite the increase of AVAP's funding, the external evaluators interviewed by the review panel expressed a clear opinion that the remuneration offered by AVAP for their services is considerably lower than the one by other agencies in Spain.

AVAP has a secretariat with 16 full-time staff members altogether that implements the activities according to the legal mandate. The secretariat is divided into two areas that are managed by the head of area, these include:

- Management, Forecasting and Public Services Area: The area is managed by a head and covers the overall management and administration of the agency with one technical and two administrative staff.
- Quality in Higher Education & Innovation Area: The biggest area is managed by a head and covers the activities that fall under the ESG. Three technical staff members are responsible for one of the three main activities - reviews, thematic analyses and other foresight reports, and finally the activities in the field of R&D&I, each; furthermore, three administrative staff belong to this unit.

The Director is supported by the Director's secretariat. There is also a separate Internationalisation & Cooperation Unit which shares staff with the Quality in Higher Education & Innovation Area. The unit is managed by a Head of Unit and covers activities in the field of R&D&I with one responsible technical staff (joint responsibility with Quality in Higher education & Innovation Area), and degree evaluation with one responsible technical staff.

With regard to the staff that is responsible for all review activities and the support to the relevant decision-making bodies the panel learned during the site-visit that this is only one staff member (Technician of Quality in Higher Education) for all reviews of each type and that his/her involvement

in organising the review procedures is very limited because large parts of the processes are organised by the secretary of the expert group which is the student member of the group.

A significant number of the current staff members have arrived to AVAP in 2020. There are only a few staff members who were employed before 2019. There are also several staff members who had left at the time of the site visit and AVAP was looking for replacements.

In 2022/2023 AVAP plans to double staff numbers because of the new responsibilities in decision-making which the agency wants to assume after having been granted ENQA membership and being included in EQAR. In structural terms the growth shall result among others in empowered Quality in Higher Education & Innovation Area that is split in several specialised areas and employs more technicians, upgrading the international unit into an area with additional staff and head of area.

AVAP considers its personnel resources sufficient for the current activities; during the site visit the staff confirmed that its current workload is adequate. At the same time in its SWOT analysis, AVAP highlights the *lack of permanence of qualified staff* and *low number of technical staff* as a weakness. During the site-visit the review panel was informed that this results from the fact that so far, all staff have been public officers who frequently change their positions when pursuing their career in the public service. AVAP plans to hire more private staff in order to lower the risk of losing experienced staff. This is supposed to have another positive effect as AVAP will be able to select qualified staff with relevant experience through focused recruitment procedures.

At the beginning of every year, AVAP conducts internal analysis of the expected workload and, if necessary, redistributes staff resources.

AVAP staff has the opportunity to participate in staff development activities organised by the relevant agency for the public service; in 2020 and 2021 staff participated in around 30 seminars altogether which lasted between 5 and 25 hours. So far, AVAP hasn't organised additional internal staff development activities; induction of new staff consists mainly of a lecture about relevant laws and regulations.

AVAP has recently moved to new premises. The review panel was informed during the site-visit that the new office premises brought about a substantial improvement with regard to office space and equipment.

## **Analysis**

AVAP has a strong financial position which is based on the substantial government funding of the agency. The review panel considers dependence on government funding not necessarily a risk. As long as the government is committed to resource the agency adequately it can also be considered a strength. Furthermore, the panel found no indication that the reliance on government funding affects the independence and autonomy of the agency's operations. On the contrary, the fact that the government does not execute any detailed financial steering also strengthens AVAP's position. The commitment of the government to further strengthening AVAP's position was obvious during the site-visit.

With regard to staff resources the review panel learned that the current situation is perceived as good by all parties involved. The review panel wants to draw AVAP's attention to the impact of the envisaged doubling of staff numbers on internal organisation of work and on internal communication. Doubling staff numbers will likely have a huge impact on every organisation. It is understandable and even recommendable to keep organisation of work and communication informal in small organisations. But AVAP might wish to consider the needs of formalising aspects of internal communication to prepare

for the growth in staff numbers. In this context the panel wants to emphasise that the current situation with only one staff involved in reviews is sufficient for the moment. But as explained more in detail under the standard 2.4, the review panel strongly recommends to transfer any organisational responsibilities from the student member in the panel to staff member; as a consequence, if implemented this recommendation would require more staff resources for organising reviews.

The review panel supports AVAP's intention to move from public staff to private staff in order to lower staff turnover. At the same time and linked to this, the review panel wants to emphasise that staff development is generally a critical activity for quality assurance agencies and that there is substantial room for improvement. So far staff development has not been specifically focused on the AVAP's activities but stayed at the general professional skills level necessary for employees in public service. The lack of induction and staff development focusing on specific aspects of a quality assurance agency is to be considered a weakness. This will become even more relevant for AVAP once the agency will employ more staff or only private staff that is not eligible for the public service staff development scheme.

### **Panel commendations**

1. AVAP is commended for the high dedication and the working capacity of its current management and staff.

### **Panel recommendations**

1. The review panel recommends AVAP to establish an internal staff development scheme that focuses on knowledge, skills and competences specific to the activities of AVAP rather than general professional development opportunities provided to civil servants. This scheme should include an induction scheme.
2. The review panel recommends AVAP to carefully analyse the overall staff workload and responsibilities in comparison with the other quality assurance agencies and take relevant actions in order to make sure that AVAP can properly perform all its functions.

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

1. The review panel recommends AVAP to consider carefully the impact of doubling staff numbers on internal processes such as organisation of work and communication and, if necessary, introduce more formal processes.

### **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.

### **Evidence**

AVAP has defined its Quality Policy that is publicly available on AVAP's website. The Quality Policy states that the Management Committee, assumingly the Steering Committee, declares its commitment to quality, continuous improvement, compliance with customer, legal and regulatory requirements and

with the needs and expectations of the interested parties in the services provided by AVAP. The Quality Policy also states that the Quality Management System is developed with this objective in mind.

According to the Quality Policy, the basic principles of AVAP's actions are:

- the commitment to achieve and maintain high levels of satisfaction of customers and stakeholders, detecting their needs and taking into consideration their expectations in order to offer them a service that meets their requirements;
- the commitment to comply with all requirements, whether legal, contractual or of any other nature, that are applicable to AVAP due to its activity, in such a way that AVAP's actions in no case may violate the legal requirements and specifications established by the different public entities;
- the commitment to carry out activities within a management environment that ensures continuous improvement of the effectiveness of our processes and our relationships with AVAP's stakeholders, through the establishment and regular review of our quality objectives;
- the commitment to comply with all international criteria and guidelines of the different systems in which AVAP operates and, in particular, those relating to quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area;
- commitment to effectively monitor and manage all of AVAP's operations in a transparent and accountable manner, with particular emphasis on customer service, internal and external, and the relationship with our stakeholders, the organisation of activities and continuous communication with the staff.

AVAP has also developed a Code of Ethics that defines the rules for AVAP's staff and externals involved in AVAP's activities.

As regards to their internal quality assurance system, in December 2020 AVAP has undergone the certification against the ISO 9001:2015 standard. As foreseen by the ISO standard, AVAP has divided its processes into strategic processes, operational processes and support processes.

Following the review panel's request to provide a Quality Handbook, if existing, AVAP provided a collection of process descriptions (manual of internal procedures), including the ones for different quality assessment procedures. According to the information from AVAP, this manual has not been updated and the existing process descriptions have been put together following the request from the review panel.

While it was not presented in the SAR under this standard, the review panel also learned that AVAP has recently (in 2021) started collecting feedback from different stakeholders and performed the first analysis based on the results of this feedback. The feedback in 2021 was collected from different users benefiting from AVAP's services - in total 1111 respondents. The responses related to the activities within the scope of the ESG were - 50 from evaluators in reaccreditation procedure, seven from the Accreditation Commission, 436 from the degree monitoring evaluators and eight from university quality units. However, the majority of respondents were related to other functions of AVAP, not the ones within the scope of the ESG. The overall satisfaction level with the AVAP's services has been very high. However, the critical remarks and comments elucidate the issues mentioned in other sections of this report - lack of training for evaluators, low payment for external evaluators, experience with AVAP changing the assessment done by experts, lack of feedback to the external evaluators on the final content of the report and issues with the electronic platform for reviews (SIAVAL).

AVAP is currently a small organisation in terms of staff, and consequently the communication between staff members takes place informally and on an everyday basis. However, there are a number of procedural arrangements in place, too.

All individuals providing any services to AVAP both as permanent staff and external contractors are subject to the statement on non-existence of conflict of interest. The definition of conflict of interest as stated in Law 40/2015 on the Legal Regime of the Public Sector is used. Conflict of interest is identified if the person is found to have:

- a) a personal interest in the matter in question or in another matter whose resolution could influence that of the former;
- b) a marital relationship or similar de facto situation and a blood relationship within the fourth degree or an affinity within the second degree with any of the interested parties;
- c) a close friendship or manifest enmity with any of the persons mentioned in the previous section;
- d) intervened as an expert or witness in the proceedings in question;
- e) service relationship with a natural or legal person directly interested in the case, or having provided them with professional services of any kind and in any circumstance or place in the last two years.

According to AVAP, each new staff member is provided with a copy of the Law and Decree of Regulations of AVAP, copy of all Protocols and Guides, copy of the Code of Ethics. Each staff member meets the Head of Service (assumingly, the Area) and has a personalised meeting to learn the tasks that they will have to carry out. Additionally, a meeting/ training session with the company that manages the electronic platforms where the reports are produced is scheduled as soon as a new staff member arrives. Each new external evaluator is provided with a copy of Protocols and Guides, Code of Ethics, and confidentiality statement.

According to AVAP, there is no initial documentation that would be provided to the members of the Steering Committee and the Advisory Council.

## **Analysis**

In the SAR AVAP has presented the Quality Policy, Code of Ethics and the compliance with the ISO 9001:2015 as the main components of its internal quality assurance system. However, in the related section of the SAR the main emphasis by AVAP was put on the Code of Ethics and ISO certification and the Quality Policy was mentioned only as supporting evidence.

The Quality Policy defines the main principles for AVAP's operation, the Code of Ethics consists of a list of recommendations and limits that newcomers to AVAP should comply with in order to perform their different roles. During the site visit the review panel learned that the Code of Ethics is presented to each person who enters in any kind of employment with AVAP.

The panel learned that, apart from a collection of process descriptions, AVAP does not have a Quality Manual or a similar document that would be linked to the principles set by the Quality Policy, describe the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in AVAP's activities and define AVAP's internal indicators for quality.

Moreover, the majority of process descriptions provided by AVAP date back to 2020, raising the question whether no such changes have taken place that would require an update of any of these descriptions. During the site visit the review panel learned that there is an intention to update descriptions but it has not been done yet.

The review panel would like to note that, while compliance with an ISO standard certainly serves as evidence that some internal processes are documented and implemented in a consistent way, it cannot be considered as proof of a fully functioning and ESG compliant internal quality assurance system. Thus, more attention should be paid to the different elements required by the ESG 3.6, namely the policies and procedures for ensuring the consistency of activities, measurement of the quality of AVAPs activities and aspects of continuous improvement.

Also, the practice of conducting surveys for the stakeholders is very recent. The review panel got acquainted with the summary reports but did not learn of any systematic way for implementing the recommendations. During the interviews with different stakeholders there was no evidence of closing the feedback loop for those surveyed and reporting on any changes.

Despite the shortcomings described above, the review panel acknowledges all formal elements of the internal quality assurance system established by AVAP - procedure for avoiding conflict of interest in its assessments, existence of the Code of Ethics, as well as the initial steps in conducting surveys for its stakeholders - and thinks that it is a good start. Although AVAP has been operational since 2006 and a more robust approach to internal quality assurance would be expected from an organisation with such history, the review panel understands that major changes have taken place since 2019 in all areas of AVAP's operations and more time would need to pass in order to objectively evaluate all the new developments that still will take place. Therefore, the review panel judges the current stage of developments as substantially compliant with the ESG.

However, with the planned increase in AVAP's size and staffing and when assuming the responsibility for the new functions, the importance of a clearly documented and consistently implemented internal quality assurance system and a functional feedback loop will be crucial. This has to be considered in AVAP's further developments and for its subsequent review against the ESG.

#### **Panel commendations**

1. AVAP is commended for its awareness of the need to systematically collect feedback from its stakeholders.

#### **Panel recommendations**

1. The review panel recommends AVAP to develop a Quality Handbook that would be linked to the principles set by the Quality Policy, describe the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in AVAP's activities and define AVAP's internal indicators for quality and mechanisms for their monitoring.
2. The review panel recommends AVAP to conduct workshops and training activities for its staff and stakeholders on a regular basis.
3. The review panel recommends AVAP to systemize the feedback received during evaluation procedures through establishing an immediate follow-up procedure after every evaluation in order to assess their quality and suggest ways to improve it.

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

1. The review panel suggests that AVAP reviews its manual of internal procedures.

#### **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

AVAP has been an affiliate of ENQA since 2016. This is the first external review of the agency in order to demonstrate compliance with the ESG.

Membership of ENQA and inclusion in EQAR is one of the top priorities of AVAP's current strategic plan because, according to article 25.2 of Royal Decree 822/2021, only after inclusion in EQAR AVAP will be in the legal position to take full responsibility for authorization of new study programmes and accreditation of university institutions. During the site visit the review panel was assured of the extensive support by all stakeholders, including universities, students and the Regional Government to pursue this external evaluation and to assume new responsibilities in the future.

Article 17 of the AVAP regulations stipulates a different kind of compulsory external review by requiring the agency to have its internal quality management system being externally evaluated. AVAP underwent an ISO 9001:2015 certification process in 2020. So far AVAP has not undergone other external reviews such as against the ESG.

### Analysis

The evidence obtained by the review panel clearly confirms that AVAP is motivated to become a member of ENQA and being included in EQAR and supported by its stakeholders in this mission.

In the future, AVAP will have to regularly renew its registration on EQAR in order to maintain its status as a decision-making body in the authorization of new study programmes and accreditation of university centres. Nonetheless, an external evaluation against the ESG is not a legal obligation of AVAP.

The panel has come to the conclusion that AVAP's commitment to undergo regular ENQA reviews is convincing because of the legal implications of ENQA membership and inclusion in EQAR which make such reviews de facto mandatory for AVAP.

**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 I of the ESG.

## Evidence

The review panel requested a mapping that would demonstrate how the ESG Part I is covered by the assessment procedures currently implemented by AVAP and will be covered by all assessment procedures that are planned in the future.

The final mapping by AVAP (compiled version presented in Annex 6) includes the following assessment procedures:

- Authorization of new programmes (a comparison of the authorization phase that is performed by AVAP currently and the verification phase that will replace authorization once AVAP is registered on EQAR);
- Follow-up of study programmes;
- Study programmes certification renewal.

The mapping does not include the Support programme for the evaluation of teaching activities (DOCENTIA) as this procedure was included in the ToR at a later stage. DOCENTIA aims to support universities in the design of its own mechanisms to manage the quality of the teaching activity of university teaching staff and favour its development and recognition, and takes ESG as a general reference rather than addressing the whole ESG Part I in its typical understanding. According to the information provided by AVAP and also published on AVAP website, the DOCENTIA programme is carried out following the principles defined by ANECA in collaboration with ANECA, and AVAP has not defined any specific standards or guidelines for it.

AVAP stated that the standards and processes used by AVAP for authorization do not follow the usual steps recommended by ESG 2.3. The verification process, which will be carried out by AVAP when AVAP is listed in EQAR, has been designed to cover all standards of the ESG Part I.

Each standard used by AVAP in its assessment procedures is further elaborated through more detailed guidelines. The mapping provided in Annex 6 lists the standards for authorization and verification and both the standards and also the related guidelines for certification renewal and follow-up. The standards used in the follow-up are exactly the same as used in the Certification renewal, only the nature of the assessment is different.

In the AVAP's Strategic plan one of the areas of work is "*Improving the quality of the Valencian university system*" that is further operationalised by several objectives focusing on improving the quality assessment processes by AVAP and also on strengthening the quality culture in universities. In the SAR it is emphasised that AVAP Director holds regular meetings with the Quality Area managers of each university in the Valencian region in order to maintain communication and organise joint activities for improving the higher education system.

In the SAR, AVAP often refers to a "Complaints, suggestions and congratulations box", stating that it is one of the information and feedback mechanisms for AVAP to ensure quality at higher education institutions and detect areas for improvement. However, from the other information provided the review panel learned that these boxes are located at higher education institutions and used for their internal purposes but not related with AVAP.

## Analysis

During the site visit the review panel learned that all assessment methodologies used by AVAP are developed and discussed at the national level within REACU. However, it was the understanding of the review panel that the proposal by REACU sets only the overall framework and does not prescribe that the methodology has to be applied precisely as it was developed.

All AVAP's assessment procedures are currently focused on study programme level (ex-ante and ex-post assessments), except the DOCENTIA that looks at the mechanisms for managing teaching quality. It is therefore not clear to what extent AVAP in this framework encourages and supports the development of internal quality assurance systems at the universities. It is, however, understandable that AVAP operates in the framework set out by different Royal Decrees and further operationalised by the REACU and ANECA. Therefore, AVAP cannot be held responsible for the overall setup of the Spanish external quality assurance system.

All official study programmes in the Valencian region are subject to mandatory authorization/verification and certification renewal procedures and also to follow-up procedures that cover all standards of the ESG Part I. Therefore, the review panel can conclude that overall, the standards used during the assessment procedures cover the ESG Part I for each study programme in the Valencian region.

If looked at every assessment procedure separately, one exception is the DOCENTIA programme. In regard to DOCENTIA, the review panel can conclude that this assessment procedure is performed jointly by AVAP and ANECA, according to a general methodology. As DOCENTIA focuses on supporting universities in the design of its own mechanisms to manage the quality of the teaching activity of university teaching staff, it has purposefully not been designed to cover all standards of the ESG and the review panel acknowledges its specific purpose.

The other exception is the authorization procedure that does not cover ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support and ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance. These standards are currently covered by ANECA that employs a verification methodology fully covering the ESG Part I (as presented in the Table I). AVAP will be eligible to use the verification methodology after its registration on EQAR, at the same time abolishing the authorization procedure.

The procedures for certification renewal and follow-up of study programmes cover all ESG Part I standards from different angles and no specific changes are foreseen in these procedures after AVAP's EQAR registration.

The evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions is a new element in the Spanish quality assurance system and would focus on enhancement and accountability at the same time. However, the review panel is currently unable to comment on this methodology as no detailed methodology by AVAP has been developed at the time of this review. The review protocol by REACU provided to the review panel only briefly outlines the assessment process but does not explain how the ESG Part I would be covered in detail.

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

1. The review panel suggests that AVAP considers all ESG Part I standards when designing the assessment standards and guidelines for assessment procedures yet to be implemented, in particular, the evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions.
2. The review panel suggests that AVAP incorporates the notion of quality culture in its methodology for the evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions, thus making this assessment procedure focused on enhancement rather than on accountability.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

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

### Evidence

During the site visit the review panel learned that all assessment protocols (frameworks and methodologies) used by AVAP are developed and discussed at the national level within REACU, meaning that they are jointly established by all quality assurance agencies. However, the proposal by REACU sets only the overall framework and does not need to be applied in an identical way.

Currently, AVAP is applying protocols for the following procedures:

- Authorization of new programmes;
- Follow-up of study programmes (separate methodology for bachelor's and master's programmes and separate methodology for PhD programmes);
- Study programmes certification renewal (separate methodology for bachelor's and master's programmes and separate methodology for PhD programmes);
- Support Programme for the Evaluation of Teaching Activities (DOCENTIA).

The review panel learned that the assessment methodologies by AVAP are currently approved (but not discussed) by the Steering Committee and that there is a plan to establish a separate body - Committee of methodologies, protocols and appointments.

In the SAR AVAP states that it has full independence to create or modify the procedures, protocols and methodologies within the framework established by regulations and REACU and following the ESG. The SAR also states that during the first semester of 2021 AVAP undertook a revision of the Protocols and Guides for authorization, follow-up and certification renewal of degrees, and representatives from the Valencian universities were contacted to know their opinion. The SAR also states that the experts involved in the evaluation processes are also consulted.

However, during the site visit, the review panel received mixed evidence about the actual development process of methodologies for AVAP. The higher education institutions indicated that some assessment methodologies have been discussed with them. During other interviews the review panel was informed that the suggestions and amendments made by AVAP to the protocols developed by REACU relate only to submission deadlines for certain procedures and technical amendments to the templates used. As for the input from the experts involved in assessment processes, the review panel learned that the first stakeholder survey took place in 2021. The results of the survey are recent and the review panel did not learn of any changes following the feedback.

In the SAR and also during the site visit AVAP states that the AVAP Director holds regular meetings with the Regional Director of higher education and the Regional Director of research & innovation, to coordinate the activity of AVAP with the educational policy of the region. However, none of the interviewees during the site visit mentioned any content-related input from the Regional Secretariat to AVAP assessment methodologies or at least strategic insights provided by the Regional Secretariat, for example, elements that would be of special importance for the Valencian region and would need to be assessed during the quality assessment.

## Analysis

The review panel is aware that the types of external quality assurance procedures in Spain are defined at the national level. Therefore, the review panel finds it important that the review procedures carried out in different autonomous communities of Spain follow a similar framework that has been agreed by all quality assurance agencies in Spain. However, the review panel is of the opinion that the methodologies must not be just replicated on the level of each autonomous community and that every agency has to be the owner of its methodologies.

This should be reflected both by content-related adjustments made to the methodologies used by AVAP and also by the general sense of ownership over their methodologies demonstrated by the AVAP. Unfortunately, at the current development stage of AVAP the review panel felt that the methodologies are taken from REACU rather than designed and owned by AVAP.

Both before and during the site visit the review panel made a significant effort in exploring whether and how AVAP works with the assessment protocols provided by REACU and what are the modifications and additions made by AVAP. However, the review panel did not obtain evidence that AVAP would have been an active contributor to the development of the methodologies and also had made an effort in adjusting them to the needs of the Valencian community. Also, in regard to adjustments made to the methodologies, the review panel received contradicting information. While it was mentioned by some interviewees that they had participated in revision of some methodologies, it was later explained by other interviewees that these revisions are usually related to setting the submission deadlines for assessments in the Valencian region and technical issues but do not concern the standards or guidelines for assessment. At certain discussions it felt that AVAP is either not aware that any modifications could be made or considers that making any modifications to the protocols would be improper.

While the Director of AVAP holds regular meetings with the government on the educational policy in the region, the review panel did not learn of any expectations from the government in relation to the assessment methodologies or criteria. While AVAP has to be the one in charge of methodologies, thus ensuring the operational independence, the specific needs of the region should be identified and taken into account and there should be a dialogue between AVAP and the government in this regard.

According to the information provided by AVAP, the methodologies are approved by the Steering Committee. However, the approval process is formal and the Steering Committee does not discuss the methodologies.

The review panel is aware that AVAP is planning to establish a separate body - Committee of methodologies, protocols and appointments - that will be in charge of designing and approving the different regulations, protocols, guides and methodologies necessary to carry out the evaluation and foresight processes and tasks entrusted to AVAP. The review panel commends this decision but at the same time emphasises the importance of initiating and supporting discussions on the topic in general and only then establishing a formal body that would be in charge of this.

While the review panel strongly advocates the independence of AVAP from the Regional Government, the review panel is of the opinion that the focus of assessment procedures should be aligned with the needs of the region and streamlined with the strategic directions of the educational policy in the region, for example, internationalisation or digitalisation etc.

## Panel recommendations

1. The review panel recommends AVAP to take an active position in developing its assessment methodologies with genuine involvement from stakeholders, in particular, the higher education institutions, and following the strategic priorities set for the education policy in the Valencian region.
2. The review panel recommends AVAP to develop an internal procedure that would allow them to discuss the methodologies for the assessment of degrees, the guidelines and protocols internally and externally, through a transparent procedure.
3. The review panel recommends AVAP to include questions related to assessment methodologies in its surveys to the higher education institutions and experts involved in assessment processes and to use the feedback for improvement of its methodologies.
4. The review panel recommends AVAP to ensure full representation of its stakeholders in the establishment of the Committee of methodologies, protocols and appointments.

## Panel suggestions for further improvement

1. AVAP could take a more proactive role in REACU especially when assuming additional responsibilities after EQAR registration and when prompted for a full role as an independent agency from ANECA.

## 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

The protocols and guidelines for all assessment procedures performed by AVAP are approved by the AVAP's Steering Committee and published on the AVAP's website - <https://avap.es/en/higher-education/>. The different stages of assessment procedures performed by AVAP are demonstrated in the table below (Table 2).

For all assessment procedures a set of documentation prepared by the university (self-evaluation report or equivalent) is foreseen. The content of this documentation is set by the assessment protocols. The review panel studied a sample of documentation for every assessment procedure implemented by AVAP and could conclude that the protocols are followed.

As for the site visit, the only assessment procedure that currently includes it is the certification renewal procedure. During the site visit the meetings with the management team, degree coordinators, teaching staff, students, administration and services staff, graduates, and employers participate and the facilities are visited. The site visits are implemented also at three stages of the DOCENTIA procedure.

AVAP states that for the authorization of study programmes the site visit is not necessary as the university may not have assigned facilities or professors to a programme which does not exist yet. In the SAR AVAP also states that the process that it currently uses for issuing the authorization report overall does not follow the ESG 2.3. According to AVAP, the follow-up does not include a site visit as during this activity the evaluators assess whether the improvement plan set up by the university is being complied with and this assessment does not focus on installations (facilities).

Every assessment process results in a report. The way of producing the external review report is different for each procedure. The common element is the existence of a provisional (interim) and final report. The interim report is the report produced by external evaluators and/or the decision-making body before sending it to the university for providing comments. The deadline given to the university for providing comments is 20 days. The final report is the report when the comments from the university have already been considered. Further information is given under standards 2.5 and 2.6.

According to AVAP, the reliability and consistency of review procedures are ensured by the following mechanisms:

- Evaluation protocols;
- Support of the AVAP staff that assist groups of external evaluators and the decision-making bodies.

AVAP states that the role of its technical staff is crucial in ensuring consistency and that the staff would follow the performance of every external evaluator and instruct them, if needed. Also, a technician from AVAP would always review the report to check the wording and detect inconsistencies. However, the review panel has described the overall situation with AVAP human resources under the standard 3.5. There is only one staff member (Technician of Quality in Higher Education) in charge of all the reviews within the scope of ESG (except DOCENTIA) and the Head of Area of Quality serves as the secretary of all decision-making bodies related to the activities within the scope of ESG.

According to the methodologies and information provided by AVAP, there is no specific follow-up procedure for every assessment procedure. In the SAR AVAP explains the follow-up as the cyclical nature of assessments (every six or eight years). However, the review panel learned that the “study programme follow-up procedure” has become mandatory in 2021 according to the changes in the national legislation. This means that every study programme will be subject to the “study programme follow-up procedure” within three years after the verification and start of implementation of the programme and within three years after certification renewal.

AVAP has recently made an effort to collect feedback from stakeholders that could be used for improving processes. However, currently there is no evidence that this feedback has been used.

Table 2

## Steps of the assessment procedures by AVAP

	<b>Authorization of new programmes (currently)</b>	<b>Verification of new programmes (will replace the authorization after registration on EQAR)</b>	<b>Follow-up (no changes foreseen after EQAR registration)</b>	<b>Certification renewal (no changes foreseen after EQAR registration)</b>	<b>DOCENTIA (no changes foreseen after EQAR registration)</b>
<b>Self-assessment report</b>	Yes, AVAP provides a template.	Yes, AVAP provides a template.	Yes, AVAP provides a template.	Yes, AVAP provides a template.	Yes, AVAP provides a template.
<b>Expert panel</b>	Yes, External Evaluators	Yes, Verification Committee	No	Yes, External Evaluation Committee	Design, Monitoring and Certification Evaluation Commission, jointly established with ANECA
<b>Site visit</b>	No	No	No	Yes	Yes, at three stages of implementation
<b>Assessment report</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (by the Design, Monitoring and Certification Evaluation Commission, jointly established with ANECA)
<b>Body responsible for decision-making</b>	Authorization (Degree) Evaluation Committee	Council of Universities	Follow-up Evaluation Committee	Accreditation Commission	Design, Monitoring and Certification Evaluation Commission, jointly established with ANECA)
<b>Appeals can be submitted to</b>	-	-	-	Presidency of Council of Universities	-
<b>Follow-up</b>	No specific procedure	No specific procedure	No specific procedure, this procedure functions as follow-up for all procedures	No specific procedure	Yes, incorporated in the procedure itself

## **Analysis**

The review panel can confirm that all assessment procedures carried out by AVAP follow a predefined methodology (protocols) that foresees the components and steps of each procedure. From the perspective of a university under evaluation, the information included in the protocols is sufficient and clear.

The assessment methodologies by AVAP to a large extent follow the stages recommended by ESG 2.3, however, the review panel would like to focus on a few specific elements.

The site visit is currently included in the methodology for certification renewal and DOCENTIA, but not for the authorization of study programmes and the follow-up of study programmes. While the review panel understands that these arrangements are established by the Royal Decree (822/2021) and not by AVAP, the review panel is of the opinion that both procedures, especially the authorization of study programmes, would benefit from a site visit. From the point of view of the review panel it is important to learn about the prospects of the study programme from the personnel that will be involved in its implementation and the added value of a site visit is not only the possibility to see the facilities but also to have an interactive discussion with the staff and ask questions.

As for the review reports, the review panel can confirm that for each assessment there is a report. Further information is provided under standard 2.6.

As for the follow-up, the review panel learned that there are no specific arrangements by AVAP, except the ones set by the national legislation. The aim of the separate assessment procedure “study programme follow-up” to follow-up on the Improvement Plans designed by the universities. As this procedure has just become mandatory for all study programmes and would take place on a regular basis (three years after the verification and three years after each certification renewal), it would cover the follow-up requirement for all assessment procedures implemented by AVAP. As for DOCENTIA, the follow-up is already included in its methodology. However, the review panel considers that the notion of follow-up is not restricted only to monitoring the implementation of recommendations and Improvement Plans of the universities. The review panel invites AVAP to explore other ways for ensuring constant and meaningful follow-up, for example, discussions, focus groups, targeted seminars that would also foster the quality culture at universities as aimed by AVAP in its strategic plan.

It was confirmed by the SAR and also during the discussions that the role of AVAP staff is significant in consistent implementation of all assessment procedures.

The review panel appreciates the effort made by AVAP to collect feedback from stakeholders (experts, decision-making bodies) that could be used for improving processes. However, currently there is no evidence that this feedback has been used.

## **Panel recommendations**

1. The review panel recommends AVAP to establish a site visit for authorization of new study programmes and foresee specific cases when site visit would be applicable in study programme follow up-procedure.

## **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

1. The review panel suggests that AVAP considers the implementation of the four-stage approach for new procedures to be established, in particular, the evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions.
2. The review panel suggests that AVAP explores other ways for ensuring follow-up, apart from implementing the “study programme follow-up” procedure.

## Panel conclusion: substantially 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

Throughout the SAR and site visit, the review panel faced discrepancies and inconsistency between the use of terms “external evaluators” or “external evaluation committee”, “experts” and other committees/ commissions, as well as the meaning added to these terms by AVAP, thus making it difficult to differentiate between the external experts and decision-making bodies. One of the reasons for this confusion could be AVAP’s understanding of “external”, as AVAP considers all members of the groups of external experts and decision-making bodies as external to AVAP and all these individuals are also external to the Valencian higher education community, For this reason the review panel has developed a table (Table 3) that includes the title and composition of all groups of external experts. The review panel will use the term “experts” when describing and analysing this standard. The references provided to documents by AVAP will include the original terminology.

In the ToR for this review, the review panel was asked to analyse how AVAP checks and ensures the ESG compliance when recognising the results of a study programme evaluation carried out by contracted experts i.e. how does AVAP ensures that experts are trained and briefed; how does AVAP ensure the inclusion of students in the group of experts; how are the roles and responsibilities in the group of experts assigned and distributed.

The Law 5/2006 states that the evaluators, in their capacity as external advisors, are not considered AVAP’s own staff and are appointed by the AVAP’s general management (assumably the Director) for an indeterminate number of cases for a renewable one-year period. The SAR states that all members of commissions and committees go through a selection process managed by the Quality in Higher Education Area. They receive financial compensation based on the number and type of assessments.

The predominant rule for selecting experts is that they have to be external to the Valencian higher education community. There is a general call for experts which is open permanently and advertised on AVAP’s website - <https://avap.es/en/external-evaluators/>. The current database of AVAP includes more than 1200 experts, with the vast majority of them representing the academic community.

The general criteria for selecting experts are set out in the Protocol for selecting AVAP evaluators and are the following.

- For the academic profile - a member of the university teaching staff or a contracted lecturer with a PhD degree, no professional connection with the universities of the university system of the Valencian Community, except in the case of evaluation processes that are carried out outside this system, having a minimum of two five-year teaching and two six-year research periods;
- For the student profile - enrolment in a PhD, masters or the last two years of a bachelor’s study programme, training and, as far as possible, experience in teaching evaluation and quality

assurance processes, no current or previous student status at any of the universities in the Valencian Community. Student representation experience and experience in quality committees of study programmes will be an asset.

- For the quality assurance professional - knowledge and experience in the design and implementation of quality assurance systems in higher education, knowledge and experience in the evaluation of institutional monitoring or accreditation, experience in verification, monitoring and/or renewal of degree accreditation.

According to the SAR, all expert groups are appointed by AVAP Director.

In the SAR AVAP refers only to the External Evaluation Committee (expert group) for the certification renewal procedure. It consists of several academic members (including a chairperson) with experience in degree verification, authorization, monitoring or accreditation processes), one student member and one quality assurance professional (referred to as technician/ technical profile in the SAR). The SAR also states that the expert group may also include members who are professionals in the scientific-technical field of the degrees to be evaluated and/or foreign experts with experience in evaluation processes if the university so requires. However, all assessment procedures take place in Spanish or Valencian. Also, one of the requirements set for international experts is the linguistic competence and ability to communicate in Spanish. This limits the possibility to use international experts only to those individuals who would be proficient in Spanish or Valencian. Although this possibility is listed, AVAP has not yet made use of experts from the scientific-technical field or international experts.

The review panel did not learn of any student members for the authorization of new programmes. For the study programme follow-up there is no specific body responsible for external assessment.

The composition of expert groups is approved by the AVAP Director (Directorate General according to the SAR, general management according to the Law 5/2006). According to the SAR, all expert group members are subject to AVAP's Code of Ethics; this was independently confirmed during the site-visit.

Once the expert group is appointed, its composition is sent to the university under assessment and the university has a period of five days in which to exercise, if necessary, the right to challenge the members selected by AVAP.

Table 3

### Composition of the expert groups for assessment procedures by AVAP

Assessment procedure	Expert group
Evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions	No information is available yet
Authorization of new programmes	<b>Two academic evaluators</b> In case of discrepancies in the reports, a third academic evaluator is appointed
Verification of new programmes ( <i>after AVAP's registration on EQAR</i> )	<b>Verification Committee</b> composed of academic evaluators and students.
Follow-up of study programmes	-
Study programmes certification renewal	<b>External Evaluation Committee (or Certification Renewal Committee)</b> <i>Chairperson with academic profile. Variable number of</i>

	<i>academic members. One student member who acts as the secretary. One member with technical profile (quality assurance professional) Professionals in the scientific-technical field and foreign experts could be included, too.</i>
Support programme for the evaluation of teaching activities (DOCENTIA)	<b>Design, Monitoring and Certification Evaluation Commission</b> , composed of four to five experts chosen from a joint database, including a student.

It has been emphasised by AVAP that all expert group members, including students, have equal rights. However, during the site-visit the review panel learned that all students in AVAP's groups of external experts for certification renewal fulfil the role of the expert group secretary which includes the preparation of the agenda for the site visit, liaising with the university under evaluation and AVAP. In addition to that, the student members of the expert group are always assigned to assess one specific standard - Information and transparency.

In the SAR AVAP states that adequate, uniform and homogeneous training of evaluators has begun recently, to be precise in 2020 when AVAP applied for the external review for ENQA membership and EQAR registration. AVAP admits that in the past the training was not carried out with the appropriate frequency due to the lack of staff. In 2020 there was a reinforcement of the staff that, according to the SAR, made it possible to start the training of evaluators. However, at the time of the site visit, the review panel learned only about two training activities - a student training in November 2021 with 50 participants and a training for evaluators for odontologist degrees in April 2021 with three participants.

In the additional information provided, AVAP states that due to the high number of evaluators and the rotation among some of them, AVAP prefers to organise personalised trainings where the technician in charge of each committee would hold separate meetings with the selected evaluators and provide them with the "reviewers package". However, none of the interviewed members of the evaluators pool could confirm this. Moreover, a unanimous need for training was expressed by all evaluators who took part in the meeting.

While it was mentioned that all experts receive remuneration for the services provided, the review panel learned that the remuneration is considerably lower compared to other agencies operating in Spain that carry out the same assessment procedures. The review panel suggests AVAP to perform a benchmarking in this regard.

## **Analysis**

Potential peer review experts can apply through the AVAP website or get referred to by the external stakeholders. AVAP then selects the peer review experts who will participate in the evaluation procedures with due process, including mechanisms to prevent conflict of interest and independence. During the interviews, it became evident that the qualification of external evaluators is overall appropriate, and they are generally competent to participate in the evaluations.

However, there are a number of issues that the review panel would like to raise.

One issue is the general use of groups of experts. A group of external experts, as defined by the ESG, participates only in the certification renewal procedure. For the follow-up procedure there is no group of external experts and for the authorization only academic experts take part in the external evaluation.

Another issue is the role of students that concerns the certification renewal procedure where students are involved. The SAR states that all members of the expert groups, including the students, have equal rights. Also, the representatives of the AVAP's reviewers pool, including the students, expressed their full conviction that the student contribution is very valuable and appreciated by the other members. Nevertheless, the review panel learned that this appreciation is mostly related to acknowledgement of the administrative tasks performed by student members. The review panel is of the opinion that the tasks currently assigned to the student experts predominantly cover organisational and administrative aspects – which in many agencies would usually be performed by an agency staff member – undermines the students' status as equal expert group members. Also, the standard that is always assigned to student members - Information and transparency - is most likely the standard with the least direct link to academic questions which also undermines the status of the student member in the expert groups. The review panel considers this not as good practice.

The final issue is the training availability for the external experts. While in the SAR AVAP states that it has recently started a reviewers training, only the student experts interviewed by the review panel could confirm the existence of some training. The other evidence about the training for the experts suggested that there is no consistent training strategy, it happens ad hoc or on an individual basis. One of the suggestions for improvement expressed to the review panel by the interviewees was the introduction of training for reviewers. This clearly indicates that there is a lack of training.

#### **Panel recommendations**

1. The review panel recommends AVAP to develop a consistent training strategy that would foresee a possibility for a regular training for all evaluators and a specific training for evaluators engaged in assessment procedures.
2. The review panel recommends AVAP urgently to reconsider the role of student members in expert groups – specifically, to remove the responsibility for administrative issues and redistribute the overall responsibilities for assessing the criteria.
3. The review panel recommends the introduction of student members in all assessment procedures currently implemented or to be implemented by AVAP.

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

1. Given the improving financial situation of AVAP, the review panel suggests reconsidering the amount of remuneration for expert work and bringing it closer to the remuneration offered by other agencies operating in Spain.
2. The review panel encourages AVAP to invite international evaluators and professionals in the scientific-technical field into their expert groups.

#### **Panel conclusion: partially 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

AVAP has developed protocols and guidelines for all assessment procedures performed by AVAP. These guidelines have been developed by the Area of Quality in Higher Education and approved by the AVAP's Steering Committee. AVAP also states that these guidelines are discussed with the universities and available publicly on AVAP's website, thus making the universities aware of the requirements beforehand.

As mentioned in all protocols, the main outcome of the process is the report with the final mark for a programme. The different stages of the reports are issued both by the expert groups (draft reports) and the decision-making bodies (interim and final reports), meaning that the decision-making bodies would have the final responsibility both for composing the report and also making the decision on the programme. The decision-making body would work with the reports/chapters prepared by the external experts but would not document the changes and reasons for changes.

The SAR states that at the beginning of each procedure all external experts are provided with the protocols and guidelines and there is an AVAP's technician assigned to each procedure who is available both to the external evaluators and the university. These tools would ensure the consistency of external evaluation.

The decision-making bodies would then convene for decision-making. Each decision making body is assisted by a secretary from AVAP that is the Head of Area of Quality in Higher Education. During the meeting with the decision-making bodies of AVAP, it became evident that the members of these bodies receive no specific training and, in general, their appointment to the decision-making bodies is based on their previous experience in assessment procedures by AVAP.

The possible marks for assessment standards **for authorization** are - Excellent, Satisfactory, Sufficient, Insufficient - with the overall mark for the report as Favourable or Unfavourable. Previously there was no specific follow-up, now it would be carried out within three years after the verification and launch of the programme.

The final outcome for authorization would be based on the following sources:

- the verified report of the degree and the verification report issued by ANECA;
- indicators from the Integrated University Information System (SIIU);
- the indicators drawn up by AVAP on the basis of information provided by the university on the qualifications of the teaching and research staff who will teach on the degree programme;
- the reports drawn up by the external evaluators in accordance with the model to be determined by AVAP;
- degree report drawn up on the basis of the requirements established in Order 86/2010, which establishes the procedure for the implementation of official university degree, master's and doctorate courses, including information on demand from the socio-economic environment and a comparison with Valencian universities for identical or similar degrees already implemented.

The final outcome for authorization can be unfavourable if the rating "Insufficient" is achieved in two or more areas or the qualification of the teaching staff is found to be insufficient or the number of study places foreseen do not comply with the demand of the socio-economic environment. The final report is mandatory but not binding.

The assessment standards for **certification renewal** have to be assessed with one of the following marks - Outstanding, Achieved, Partially Achieved, Not Achieved. Based on the assessment of each standard, the overall assessment has to be made with one of the following marks - Favourable, Favourable with requirements (resulting in an Improvement Plan) or Unfavourable. If the report is

evaluated as Favourable, it is still possible to formulate recommendations and they will be analysed in future evaluation procedures. In cases where the report is evaluated as Favourable with requirements, the report usually contains degree-related aspects that must necessarily be revised or improved through the drafting of an Improvement Plan, which must be submitted to AVAP and a follow-up will be carried out within two years.

The report can be evaluated as Unfavourable in the following cases:

- Deficiencies which, although requiring rectification, have not been corrected after having been identified in the verification, modification, follow-up or renewal of the accreditation report;
- The non-fulfilment of clear commitments and objectives assumed in the verified report or in its subsequent amendments in the areas of academic staff, support staff, material resources and services.

The report can in no case be assessed as “Favourable” if one of the following standards has been assessed with “Not Achieved”: Standard 4. Academic staff; Standard 5. Support staff, material resources and services; and Standard 6. Learning outcomes.

The final outcome of the **follow-up process** is a report with Favourable, Favourable with requirements or Unfavourable. The evaluation criteria are the same as used for the certification renewal - Outstanding, Achieved, Partially Achieved, Not Achieved.

All reports are sent to the Regional Council of Universities to issue the corresponding resolution on the renewal of the degree's accreditation.

## **Analysis**

AVAP has published their criteria and guidelines for all assessment procedures, that include criteria for the final mark of the report. Also, AVAP has recently started offering training to its reviewers' pool members to ensure that the application and interpretation of the criteria is consistent.

However, there are several elements that the review panel would like to emphasise regarding consistency of outcomes.

AVAP clearly states that the role of its technical staff is crucial in ensuring consistency and that the staff would follow the performance of every external evaluator and instruct them, if needed. Also, a technician from AVAP would always review the report to check the wording and detect inconsistencies.

While there is a manual for each assessment procedure that explains the steps and content of the assessment report, after a number of requests the review panel did not learn of any written bylaws that would regulate the decision-making process and the work of decision-making committees by AVAP. The review panel learned that the decision-making bodies are the ones issuing the interim and final report and have the right to change the content of the reports by external evaluators. However, the circumstances in which the report would be changed and the exact procedure for changing the report has not been documented. In the review panel's opinion, this poses a threat to the consistent implementation of assessment procedures. The review panel is especially concerned about the basis for changing the findings of the expert group. Also, the review panel learned that the members of decision-making bodies are invited directly by AVAP based on their previous cooperation with AVAP. There are no specific competencies that the members of decision-making bodies must possess and there is also no mandatory training foreseen for the members.

The panel learned that the internal mechanisms for ensuring consistency of the AVAP's staff performance are rather informal. The evaluation protocols are general and address the overall procedural issues that could be applicable to any agency in Spain.

AVAP staff meets on a regular basis to discuss the topical issues related to the implementation of assessment procedures. As the team is small, no concerns were raised until now. However, the review panel is of the opinion that with the increase in staff, it is important to introduce more formal mechanisms for ensuring consistency.

The training opportunities provided are still fragmented. The review panel could not at this stage confirm their positive impact on the consistency of assessment procedures and also could not confirm a consistent implementation of training processes.

### **Panel recommendations**

1. The review panel recommends AVAP to develop and publish written bylaws on the decision-making process for different decision-making bodies, particularly describing the process of changing the findings of expert teams.
2. The review panel recommends AVAP to offer mandatory training to all incoming members of their decision-making bodies and to offer possibilities for continuous professional development to all members of decision-making bodies, possibly in cooperation with other quality assurance agencies in Spain.

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

1. AVAP should continue the work on their internal process descriptions to ensure that the decision-making stage is clearly documented.
2. AVAP should ensure that the number and competencies of its technical staff is evidently sufficient for its activities in the future.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially complaint**

## 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**

The reports follow a unified structure which has been previously agreed in REACU and is included in evaluation protocols. According to the SAR, the reports go through several stages of editing, authorization and feedback and there is a transparent process with all responsibilities distributed.

There are two stages of the reports - issued by the expert groups (draft reports) and issued by the decision-making bodies (interim and final reports).

The different chapters of the report are first of all produced by the external evaluators (except for the follow-up procedure where there are no external evaluators). Then the full provisional (interim) report is compiled by the respective decision-making body and it is based on the chapters/ reports produced by the expert groups. These provisional reports are considered separate and independent reports rather than documented additions or modifications of the expert reports. Afterwards, the report is sent to the university for providing comments and then the report is finalised by the decision-making body and signed by the AVAP Director.

The review reports are produced in an online platform SIAVAL available to all parties involved in the assessment process (experts, decision-making bodies, universities). This platform ensures that all the fields required by the report template are filled in.

The review panel did not learn of any consistent procedures that would be applied to the draft report. During the site visit the review panel received mixed evidence about the level of changes that could be made to the text produced by the experts when transferring it to the interim and final reports. In the SAR, AVAP states that to ensure that the reports are written in a clear and uniform style, a technician from AVAP always reviews the report to check the wording and its appropriateness to the evaluation process and detect any inconsistencies that may have been made. According to the interviews and the results of the satisfaction surveys, the review panel learned that the experts are not informed about the changes to text produced by them.

The SAR also states that for the authorization procedure there is no external evaluation report. However, the protocol for this procedure states and the samples of the documentation provided by AVAP confirm that the assessment is performed by (authorization) external evaluators who produce parts of the report. Then the full report is compiled by the Degree Evaluation Committee.

The final reports by AVAP are published in a separate system on AVAP's website - <https://buscadortitulaciones.avap.es/>. The reports can be searched by several parameters - title of the programme, university, scientific area, type of assessment, year etc. However, the latest reports were published in 2019. According to the SAR, the universities must publish the results on their websites.

The review panel studied a selection of sample reports and can confirm that the structure of the reports includes an assessment for each Standard and guideline, incorporating the good practices detected and the recommendations for improvement, as well as the prescriptions involving the presentation of an improvement plan; the result of each standard and the overall result of the report. The recommendations are included in the text for the respective standard but not visibly separated from the rest of the text or in a separate section. The names of experts who performed the evaluation are not included in the report.

## **Analysis**

The review reports of AVAP undergo several editing stages during the review producing process. While the input for the report (draft report) is produced by external evaluators, the final report is produced by the decision-making body. The final report, signed by the AVAP Director, is published on a website designed for this purpose.

Based on the evidence received, the review panel can confirm that the reports produced by AVAP follow a unified structure and commonly agreed principles. This is even more supported by the fact that AVAP uses an online platform that sets templates for all review reports.

The review panel would like to note that the standard requires the reports produced by experts to be published. In the case of AVAP, the publicly available reports are produced by the decision-making bodies. The review panel considers this contradictory to the notion that the review report has to be owned by the experts performing the assessment. In addition, the review panel would find it unacceptable that the decision-making bodies would make any modifications to the expert reports, except correction of technical issues. The review panel received clear evidence that the final reports are produced by the decision-making bodies based on expert reports but without consulting the experts. The review panel, however, received mixed evidence on the nature and level of modifications to reports therefore it cannot conclude that these modifications would be related to technical issues only.

Regarding the structure of the reports, the review panel found that, while the structure is unified, the level of detail included in the analysis would vary from one case to another. The review panel links this issue to the lack of training for the experts and decision-making bodies as explained under standards 2.4 and 2.5, and the capacity of AVAP's staff to ensure consistency of all review processes as explained under standards 3.4 and 2.5. These issues are reflected by recommendations under the respective standards.

From the samples studied by the review panel, it also learned that the recommendations could be included in the analysis section for each standard and would not be clearly separated from the analysis. In the opinion of the review panel, it would improve the readability and further monitoring of the reports, if the recommendations were clearly separated from the other text either for each of the standards or for the programme in general.

### **Panel commendations**

1. The review panel commends using an internal electronic system that facilitates faster exchange of information between the parties involved in the assessment and unified structure of the reports.

### **Panel recommendations**

1. The review panel recommends that AVAP publishes the reports produced by the external experts alongside clearly documented changes that are made by the decision-making body.

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

1. The review panel suggests AVAP to notify stakeholders (experts involved in assessment and the higher education institution) of the report individually when the final report is signed and published.
2. The review panel suggests that recommendations in the review report should be separated from the evidence and analysis or included in a separate section.

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

## **ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

Standard:

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

### **Evidence**

In the SAR and its internal documents AVAP refers to two types of appeals - appeals to the report and appeals against the final resolution. AVAP does not provide any references to complaints as in the understanding of the ESG.

AVAP explains that universities can provide appeals on the provisional reports within 20 days after the report is issued. Only after these appeals are considered by the respective decision-making body, the report becomes final. AVAP states that no new information (evidence) that has not been provided in the initial set of documents, can be accepted, except the improvement plan for eliminating the

deficiencies. The improvement plan has to be specific and include objectives, indicators and the persons responsible as well as a timeline for implementation that cannot be longer than two years.

AVAP declares its intention to establish a Complaints and Appeals Commission because it considers improper that the report would be revised by the same body that issued it.

The designated body in relation to appeals against the final resolution in AVAP is the Guarantee's Committee. The Guarantee's Committee is, however, an ad-hoc body and operational only for the certification renewal procedure. The review panel learned that in the upcoming months AVAP plans to establish a Complaints and Appeals Commission that would replace the Guarantee's Committee and be operational for all evaluation procedures, not only for certification renewal. The Complaints and Appeals Commission would include academics, professionals and students and at least half of the members should have a legal background.

Appeals against the final resolution for certification renewal are submitted to the Presidency of the Council of Universities within one month from the date of notification. The Council of Universities, through the corresponding committee, may ratify the resolution or accept the appeal and send it to AVAP, indicating specifically the aspects of the assessment that must be reviewed again, all within a maximum period of three months from the date the complaint is submitted.

If any appeals are received in AVAP, they would be reviewed by an ad-hoc Guarantee's Commission.

The Guarantee's Commission consists of:

- a chairperson with an academic profile who has experience in degree verification, authorisation, monitoring or accreditation processes and who has not participated in the Accreditation Committee of the same call.
- two academic members with experience in degree verification, authorisation, monitoring or accreditation processes and who have not participated in the Accreditation Committee of the same call.
- a student member, trained in evaluation processes.
- the AVAP technician responsible for the programme for the renewal of the accreditation of qualifications, who will act as secretary, with the right to speak but not to vote.

The Guarantee's Commission is appointed by the AVAP's. The operating principles and composition of the Guarantee's Commission is not presented on AVAP's website.

AVAP's Guarantee's Commission analyses the aspects indicated by the Council of Universities and issues the corresponding report within a maximum period of one month. Once the report has been received, the Council of Universities issues the final decision within two months. This resolution is communicated to the university, to the Regional Ministry with responsibility for universities and to the Ministry with responsibility for universities. In the case a resolution is not issued within the aforementioned period, the appeal may be considered rejected.

In the SAR AVAP states that only one appeal against the Council of Universities has been submitted, in 2018. However, in the additional information folder received by the review panel an appeals case from 2019 is included, and also the members of Guarantee's Commission who were interviewed by the review panel clearly described how they represented several appeal cases.

Also, in the SAR AVAP states that the participants of any procedure managed by AVAP may submit suggestions, complaints or congratulations in the mailbox set up for this purpose. This mailbox is advertised on AVAP's website. However, the review panel did not learn of any suggestions or complaints that would have been received through this mailbox. On the contrary, it was emphasised

by AVAP that the communication with its stakeholders is rather informal therefore they do not expect much use of the mailbox.

## **Analysis**

The review panel would like to differentiate between the term “appeals” as used by AVAP and appeal as defined by the ESG. Whereas the ESG refer to questioning formal outcomes, AVAP refers to providing comments on the draft review report hence at a stage before determining the formal outcome.

In regard to providing comments on any factual errors identified in the report, the review panel considers this as a very useful practice that helps to ensure consistency of the report and avoid appeals to the final outcome at the later stage of the review. This practice is already implemented by a number of other quality assurance agencies and included in their methodologies as a mandatory element related to the ESG 2.3 “Implementing processes”. The review panel thinks that it is very important that the comments on factual errors in the report are addressed by the same body that has issued the report as they possess all the evidence for deciding whether it is a factual error or not. In the case of AVAP, the approach where the site visit is performed by an external group of experts but the provisional and final reports are produced by the Accreditation Council already poses a risk that the Accreditation Council might not be in the position to take well justified actions in regard to all comments. However, when it comes to challenging the final decision on the study programme (or institution), it is important that appeal is submitted to and considered by another body external to the one that took the final decision.

In the case of AVAP, the review panel understood that this another body is the Council of Universities which issues the final resolutions for all assessment procedures based on the documentation provided by AVAP but does not change the content of decisions proposed by AVAP’s decision-making bodies.

The appeals to the final outcome by AVAP on the certification renewal procedure can be contested through the Guarantee’s Commission and the latest Guarantee’s Commission was established in November 2019. However, the review panel did not learn of any possibilities for contesting the final outcome of other procedures. While AVAP has presented its intention to establish a Complaints and Appeals Commission that would be in charge of all assessment procedures by AVAP, this body is not operational at the time of this review.

While the SAR states that the Guarantee’s Commission includes a student member, the meeting minutes of the first meeting of the Guarantee’s Commission indicate that only three academic members and one AVAP’s staff member had been approved therefore the review panel questions the actual involvement of students. While in the opinion of the review panel the involvement of students in the Guarantee’s Commission is not mandatory, it is crucial to ensure that the actual composition of the commission complies with what is stated by regulatory documents.

Similarly to the situation with other decision-making bodies, the review panel did not learn of any official application procedure for becoming a member of the Guarantee’s Commission, except that the full composition is approved by the Director of AVAP. The members of the Guarantee’s Commission admitted that they were invited to serve in the commission personally, based on their previous experience with AVAP and did not undergo an open selection process.

While the review panel got acquainted with the terminology used by AVAP, it is of the opinion that the term “appeals” itself brings with it the legal aspect of contesting/challenging something whereas the other procedural steps (possibilities for commenting on the composition of the expert group and

commenting on the review report and also submitting complaints about the process) are characteristic to quality assessment and should be separated. The review panel would therefore recommend AVAP to pay attention to how these procedural steps are communicated to the higher education institutions.

The review panel acknowledges the establishment of a mailbox for receiving complaints and suggestions. However, the possibility to use it should be communicated more and also included in AVAPs methodologies for assessment.

### **Panel recommendations**

1. The review panel recommends AVAP to establish a permanent appeals committee that would review appeals on the formal outcome of all assessment procedures implemented by AVAP.
2. The review panel recommends AVAP to establish a procedure for complaints that is different from the appeals and has clear instructions for the users defined.
3. The review panel recommends AVAP to reconsider the function of the current Guarantee's Commission in the light of new procedures for complaints and appeals.

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

1. The review panel suggests communicating the possibility to complain about procedural aspects as a part of AVAP's assessment methodologies.

### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

## ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

The review panel believes that AVAP is at a turning point. Once the agency is registered in EQAR it will assume more responsibility and decision-making powers. AVAP is in the fortunate position that its own eagerness to make this step is complemented by full support from all stakeholders, especially the universities in the Valencian community and the regional government, the latter being the primary funder of AVAP which demonstrates its support already by additional funding.

While this constitutes favourable external framework conditions for AVAP to make the next step in its development towards a fully-fledged and internationally recognized quality assurance agency, the review panel wants to emphasise that this developmental step also needs careful consideration of the internal structures and processes to meet new requirements.

Both more decision-making powers and growth of the organisation by doubling staff numbers means new challenges in terms of reliability and transparency of the decision-making processes and new challenges in terms of managing the organisation.

With regard to the latter, AVAP should consider the consequences of the substantially higher number of staff for an organisation that -understandably- relies on a certain level of informality. To assure consistent implementation of internal processes in all areas, especially in conduct of the review procedures, preparation of decision-making at the various committees, staff development and not the least to enhance internal quality assurance AVAP might wish to consider higher levels of formalisation of its internal processes.

With regard to the greater decision-making responsibilities AVAP might wish to consider challenges resulting from this for its self-perception and also for its relationship with the universities. As regards the self-perception, the panel wishes to mention that a more self-confident and proactive attitude towards AVAP's role in the regional and national system would be important. Although the collaboration of the Spanish agencies within REACU is necessary and not to be criticised, AVAP should in the future emphasise more its own (shared) responsibility for the methodologies it uses and should play a proactive role in assuring consideration of specific Valencian features in the developmental work of REACU. For a regional quality assurance agency with full decision-making responsibility, it is important to play such an active role in order to gain and maintain recognition by all stakeholders. Both challenges are interlinked and the review panel believes that thorough consideration of these future challenges will help AVAP assuming its new role successfully.

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

### ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

1. AVAP is commended for the extensive support it receives from its stakeholders in order to become an ESG compliant agency and become a member of ENQA.

### ESG 3.5 Resources

2. AVAP is commended for the high dedication and the working capacity of its current management and staff.

### ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

3. AVAP is commended for its awareness of the need to systematically collect feedback from its stakeholders.

### ESG 2.6 Reporting

4. The review panel commends using an internal electronic system that facilitates faster exchange of information between the parties involved in the assessment and unified structure of the reports.

## OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

1. The review panel recommends that AVAP ensures that student members are actually represented in all decision-making bodies and that the full composition of each decision-making body is properly reflected on the AVAP website.

### ESG 3.3 Independence

2. The panel recommends AVAP to engage in a discussion with the Regional Government about the current state of organisational independence with a view to reduce the dominant role of the Government representatives in its governance notably the Executive Committee.
3. The panel recommends AVAP to revise the appointment procedure of the Director by the SC, in order to prove formal independence from the Regional government.
4. The panel recommends AVAP to approve Rules of Procedure for each managing and decision-making body that would regulate the decision-making procedure and formally ensure that it is consistent and fully independent
5. The panel recommends AVAP to develop and publish clear selection principles and application procedure for composing its collegial decision-making bodies, for example, the Accreditation Commission.

### ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

6. The review panel recommends AVAP to strengthen its activities in REACU's joint thematic analyses by contributing AVAP's own reports and communicating their outcomes to AVAP's stakeholders.
7. The review panel recommends AVAP to (re)start thematic analyses at the regional level, to involve regional stakeholders in identifying relevant topics and to communicate the outcomes to them.
8. The review panel recommends AVAP to consider potentials of integrating thematic analyses and foresight activities.

### **ESG 3.5 Resources**

9. The review panel recommends AVAP to establish an internal staff development scheme that focuses on knowledge, skills and competences specific to the activities of AVAP rather than general professional development opportunities provided to civil servants. This scheme should include an induction scheme.
10. The review panel recommends AVAP to carefully analyse the overall staff workload and responsibilities in comparison with the other quality assurance agencies and take relevant actions in order to make sure that AVAP can properly perform all its functions.

### **ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct**

11. The review panel recommends AVAP to develop a Quality Handbook that would be linked to the principles set by the Quality Policy, describe the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in AVAP's activities and define AVAP's internal indicators for quality and mechanisms for their monitoring.
12. The review panel recommends AVAP to conduct workshops and training activities for its staff and stakeholders on a regular basis.
13. The review panel recommends AVAP to systemize the feedback received during evaluation procedures through establishing an immediate follow-up procedure after every evaluation in order to assess their quality and suggest ways to improve it.

### **ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose**

14. The review panel recommends AVAP to take an active position in developing its assessment methodologies with genuine involvement from stakeholders, in particular, the higher education institutions, and following the strategic priorities set for the education policy in the Valencian region.
15. The review panel recommends AVAP to develop an internal procedure that would allow them to discuss the methodologies for the assessment of degrees, the guidelines and protocols internally and externally, through a transparent procedure.
16. The review panel recommends AVAP to include questions related to assessment methodologies in its surveys to the higher education institutions and experts involved in assessment processes and to use the feedback for improvement of its methodologies.
17. The review panel recommends AVAP to ensure full representation of its stakeholders in the establishment of the Committee of methodologies, protocols and appointments.

### **ESG 2.3 Implementing processes**

18. The review panel recommends AVAP to establish a site visit for authorization of new study programmes and foresee specific cases when site visit would be applicable in study programme follow-up procedure.

### **ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts**

19. The review panel recommends AVAP to develop a consistent training strategy that would foresee a possibility for a regular training for all evaluators and a specific training for evaluators engaged in assessment procedures.
20. The review panel recommends AVAP urgently to reconsider the role of student members in expert groups – specifically, to remove the responsibility for administrative issues and redistribute the overall responsibilities for assessing the criteria.
21. The review panel recommends the introduction of student members in all assessment procedures currently implemented or to be implemented by AVAP.

## **ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes**

22. The review panel recommends AVAP to develop and publish written bylaws on the decision-making process for different decision-making bodies, particularly describing the process of changing the findings of expert teams.
23. The review panel recommends AVAP to offer mandatory training to all incoming members of their decision-making bodies and to offer possibilities for continuous professional development to all members of decision-making bodies, possibly in cooperation with other quality assurance agencies in Spain.

## **ESG 2.6 Reporting**

24. The review panel recommends that AVAP publishes the reports produced by the external experts alongside clearly documented changes that are made by the decision-making body.

## **ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals**

25. The review panel recommends AVAP to establish a permanent appeals committee that would review appeals on the formal outcome of all assessment procedures implemented by AVAP.
26. The review panel recommends AVAP to establish a procedure for complaints that is different from the appeals and has clear instructions for the users defined.
27. The review panel recommends AVAP to reconsider the function of the current Guarantee's Commission in the light of new procedures for complaints and appeals.

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

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The panel would like to make some general and more detailed suggestions, extending beyond strictly interpreted ESG and/or linking several ESG, which AVAP may wish to consider when reflecting on its further development. All suggestions have already been included in the previous sections.

### **ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance**

1. More international members could take part in the decisions of AVAP and as stakeholders in the governing bodies of the agency.

### **ESG 3.5 Resources**

2. The review panel recommends AVAP to consider carefully the impact of doubling staff numbers on internal processes such as organisation of work and communication and, if necessary, introduce more formal processes.

### **ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct**

3. The review panel suggests that AVAP reviews its manual of internal procedures

## **ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance**

4. The review panel suggests that AVAP considers all ESG Part I standards when designing the assessment standards and guidelines for assessment procedures yet to be implemented, in particular, the evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions.
5. The review panel suggests that AVAP incorporates the notion of quality culture in its methodology for the evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university

institutions, thus making this assessment procedure focused on enhancement rather than on accountability.

### **ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose**

6. AVAP could take a more proactive role in REACU especially when assuming additional responsibilities after EQAR registration and when prompted for a full role as an independent agency from ANECA.

### **ESG 2.3 Implementing processes**

7. The review panel suggests that AVAP considers the implementation of the four-stage approach for new procedures to be established, in particular, the evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions.
8. The review panel suggests that AVAP explores other ways for ensuring follow-up, apart from implementing the “study programme follow-up” procedure.

### **ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts**

9. Given the improving financial situation of AVAP, the review panel suggests reconsidering the amount of remuneration for expert work and bringing it closer to the remuneration offered by other agencies operating in Spain.
10. The review panel encourages AVAP to invite international evaluators and professionals in the scientific-technical field into their expert groups.

### **ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes**

11. AVAP should continue the work on their internal process descriptions to ensure that the decision-making stage is clearly documented.
12. AVAP should ensure that the number and competencies of its technical staff is evidently sufficient for its activities in the future.

### **ESG 2.6 Reporting**

13. The review panel suggests AVAP to notify stakeholders (experts involved in assessment and the higher education institution) of the report individually when the final report is signed and published.
14. The review panel suggests that recommendations in the review report should be separated from the evidence and analysis or included in a separate section.

### **ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals**

15. The review panel suggests communicating the possibility to complain about procedural aspects as a part of AVAP's assessment methodologies.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX I: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

SESSION NO.	TIMING (CET)	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
<b>24.01.2022 - Online meeting with the agency's resource person</b>			
1	09:30 - 11:30 12:00 - 12:30	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for site visit	
2	11:30 - 12:00	An online clarifications meeting with the agency's resource person regarding the specific national/legal context in which an agency operates, specific quality assurance system to which it belongs and key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities	Javier Oliver, AVAP's Director Reyes Giner, AVAP's Head of Higher Education Quality and Innovation Area Sol Rodrigo, AVAP's Head of Internationalisation and University Quality
<b>09.02.2022 – Day I</b>			
	09:00 - 09:30	Review panel's private meeting	
	09:30 - 09:40	Break/ connection set-up	
5	09:40 - 10:30	Meeting with the Director and the President	Carolina Pascual: AVAP's CEO and Head of the University Innovation Council of Valencian Region Javier Oliver: AVAP's Director
	10:30 - 10:50	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
6	10:50 - 11:35	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report	Javier Oliver: AVAP's Director Reyes Giner: AVAP's Head of Higher Education Quality and Innovation Area Sol Rodrigo: AVAP's Head of Internationalization and University Quality
	11:35 - 11:50	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
7	11:50 - 12:50	Meeting with the Steering Committee of AVAP	María Alpuente: Professor of Computer Science at U. Politecnica Valencia

			<p>José Sobrino: Professor of Earth Physics and Thermodynamics at U. Valencia</p> <p>Pablo Albalade: Vicerepresentative at the Student's Council at U. Jaume I</p> <p>Sonia Tirado: Director of Innovation at University &amp; Innovation Council</p> <p>Fernando Maestre : Distinguished Researcher at Ecology Field at U. Alicante</p>
	12:50 - 13:10	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
8	13:10 - 14:00	Meeting with the representatives of Regional Government and Regional Secretariat of Higher Education ( <i>all at the same time members of AVAP's Executive Committee and Steering Committee</i> )	<p>Carolina Pascual: AVAP's CEO and Head of the University &amp; Innovation Council of Valencian Region</p> <p>Carmen Bevia: Regional Secretariat at University &amp; Innovation Council</p> <p>Pilar Ezpeleta: Director of Universities at University &amp; Innovation Council</p> <p>Ángel Carbonell: Director of Science and Research at University &amp; Innovation Council</p>
	14:00 - 15:00	Lunch (panel only)	
	15:00 - 15:20	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
9	15:20 - 16:20	Meeting with staff of the agency in charge of external QA activities, including the head of area (Quality in Higher Education and Innovation)	<p>Reyes Giner: Head of Higher Education Quality and Innovation Area</p> <p>Pablo Pucilowski: Head of Quality in Higher Education Section</p> <p>Ana Anaya: Study programmes Technician</p> <p>Juan Nieto: Administrative staff (manages Committee's list and payments)</p> <p>Juan Pablo Molina: Administrative staff (payments to evaluators)</p> <p>Inma March: Head of Section of Research of European Programmes</p> <p>Miriam Martí: Research Management Technician</p>
	16:20 - 16:40	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	

10	16:40 - 17:40	Meeting with the AVAP's staff in charge of providing support services, including the head of area (Management, Forecasting and Public Services)	Ana Dominguez: Head of Management, Forecasting and Public Services Area Sonia López: Head of Section of Cash Flow Lidia Orengo: Technician Paco López: Administrative Staff Josefina García: Administrative Staff
	17:40 - 18:30	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day 2	
<b>10.02.2022 – Day 2</b>			
	09:00 - 09:20	Review panel's private meeting/ connection set-up	
11	09:20 - 10:20	Meeting with permanent decision-making committees of AVAP ( <b>Authorisation Evaluation Committee, Follow-up Evaluation Committee, Accreditation Commission</b> ), excluding the Guarantee's Commission	Jose A. Fernández: Professor in Biology at U. of Malaga. President of AVAP's Accreditation Commission Carlos Arias: Associate Professor in Business and Economy at U. Sevilla. Chair at AVAP's Accreditation Commission Eduardo García: Professor in research & educational diagnosis at U. Sevilla. Chair at AVAP's Accreditation Commission Elisa Heymann: Associate Professor Computer Architecture and Operating Systems at U. Barcelona. Chair at AVAP's Accreditation Commission Gloria Zaballa: Associate Professor Computing & Communication Technologies at U. Deusto. AVAP's Follow-Up Commission Alba Torrego: Student at U.C. Madrid and Graduated in Hispanic Philology. AVAP's Follow-Up Commission Fernando Merino: Associated Professor in Economy at U. Murcia. AVAP's Authorization Program. Carlos Tejero: Professor in Educational Sciences at U. Madrid. AVAP's Authorization Program
	10:20 - 10:40	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
12	10:40 - 11:30	Meeting with the Advisory Board	José Duato: Professor of Computer Science at U. Politecnica Valencia. President of AVAP's Advisory Council Salvador Rus: Director of ACSUCYL (Quality Agency Castilla Leon)

			<p>Luis Navarro: PhD in Agricultural Engineering at U. Politecnica Valencia. Research at the Valencian Institute of Agricultural Research</p> <p>Paula Ramis: Director of AQUIB (Quality Agency at Balearic Islands)</p> <p>Capitolina Díaz: Professor of Sociology at U. Valencia. Expert in public policies on gender equality</p>
	11:30 - 11:50	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
13	11:50 - 12:50	Meeting with representatives of some reviewed HEIs (HEI representatives who are familiar with procedures by AVAP)	<p>José Miguel Montalvá: Head of Quality and Accreditation Area at U. Politecnica Valencia</p> <p>Paco Torres: Vice-rector for Studies, Quality and Languages at U. Alicante</p> <p>Carmen Dasí: Head of Quality Area at U. Valencia</p> <p>David León: Head of Quality Area at U. Miguel Hernandez</p> <p>Mónica Rodríguez: Head of Quality Area at Valencia International University</p> <p>Inma Domenech: Quality Technician at U. Cardenal Herrera CEU</p> <p>Silvia Roselló: Quality Technician at U. Europea de Valencia</p> <p>Carolina Padrón: Quality Technician at U. Catolica Valencia</p>
	12:50 - 13:10	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
14	13:10 - 14:10	Meeting with external evaluators with experience in AVAP's procedures (including academics, students and professionals in the scientific-technical field)	<p>M<sup>a</sup> Dolores Pérez: Professor of Medical Sciences at U. Murcia</p> <p>M<sup>a</sup> Jose Rodriguez Mesa: Associated Professor in Criminal Law at U. Cadiz</p> <p>Jose Beltrán: Professor of Ancient History and Archeology of U. Sevilla</p> <p>Guillermo Jáñez: Student of Master in Cybersecurity Law and Digital Environment at U. Leon</p> <p>Alicia Presencio: Student of Phd in Communication at U.C. Madrid</p>

	14:10 - 15:10	Lunch (panel only)	
	15:10 - 15:30	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
15	15:30 - 16:20	Meeting with the Students' Committee	Pablo Albalate: Student and Vicerepresentative of Student's Council at UJI Miguel Antonio Herrero: Student and member of Student's Council at U. Miguel Hernandez Andrés Fernández: Student and Vicepresident of Institutional Relations at CREU (Student's Council of U. Valencia)
	16:20 - 16:40	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
16	16:40 - 17:30	Meeting with the Guarantee's Commission	Elvira Congosto: Professor of Research and Education Psychology at U. Madrid Eduardo García: Professor in research and educational diagnosis at U. Sevilla and President of Docentia's Evaluation Commission in ANECA M <sup>a</sup> Reyes Martínez: Professor in Labour and Social Security at U. Leon
17	17:30 - 18:30	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day 3 and provisional conclusions	
<b>11.02.2022 – Day 3</b>			
19	09:00 - 09:50	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	
	09:50 - 10:00	Break/ connection set-up	
20	10:00 - 11:00	Meeting with stakeholders who were not represented in the meeting with the Executive Committee	Marival Segarra: Vice-Rector for the Organisation of Studies, Quality, Accreditation and Languages at U. Politecnica Valencia Leonor Rodríguez: Professor of Agronomist Sciences at U. Madrid. President of AVAP's Research Commission Laureano González: Professor of Maths, Statistics and Computing at U. Cantabria Santiago Arias: Deputy Rector & Director of Health School at U. Europea de Valencia

			Vicente Felipo: Director of Príncipe Felipe Research Centre (CIPF). Head of the Neurobiology Laboratory Amparo Chirivella: Technician at Quality Area at U. Valencia Sandra Marcos: Quality Director at U. Pontificia Salamanca (previous technician at ACSUCYL)
	11:00 - 11:30	Review panel's private discussion/ break/ connection set-up	
21	11:30 - 12:30	Meeting with CEO to clarify any pending issues	Javier Oliver: AVAP's Director Sol Rodrigo: AVAP's Head of Internationalization and University Quality
	12:30 - 13:30	Private meeting between panel members to agree on the main findings	
	13:30 - 14:30	Lunch (panel only)	
	14:30 - 15:30	Private meeting between panel members to agree on the main findings	
22	15:30 - 16:30	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	Javier Oliver: AVAP's Director Reyes Giner: AVAP's Head of Higher Education Quality and Innovation Area Sol Rodrigo: AVAP's Head of Internationalization and University Quality

## **ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW**

**External review of the Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting (AVAP)  
by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)**

**Annex I: TRIPARTITE TERMS OF REFERENCE BETWEEN AVAP, ENQA  
AND EQAR  
February 2021  
Amended February 2022**

### **1. Background and context**

AVAP (Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting) was created by Law 5/2006 of 25 of May as a public law entity subject to private law. By Decree 6/2008, of January 18, of the Valencian Government, AVAP Regulations were approved. AVAP has own legal personality and assets, and full capacity to act for the fulfilment of its purposes. AVAP is within the legal framework of the Regional Department of Innovation, Universities, Science and Digital Society.

AVAP is the organism in charge of the assurance and promotion of higher education quality within the region (Comunitat Valenciana). According to this, AVAP performs the following functions:

- Evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions, programmes, teaching staff and other related activities established by the Law of Universities and other legal regulations.
- Assessment of technological, business, research and developing projects.
- Prospective and analysis of new technological, scientific and research activities to support higher education policies at the Comunitat Valenciana.

AVAP has been an affiliate of ENQA since 2016 and is applying for ENQA membership.

AVAP has not yet been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and is now applying for initial inclusion on EQAR.

### **2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation**

This review will evaluate the extent to which AVAP fulfils the requirements of Parts 2 and 3 of 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 AVAP should be granted and to EQAR to support AVAP application to the register.

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

In order for AVAP to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of AVAP 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 independent of whether the activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA and whether they are obligatory or voluntary in nature.

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

##### **1.- Higher Education Institutions:**

1. Evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions
2. Support Programme for the Evaluation of Teaching Activities (DOCENTIA)

While some activities are not yet carried out, the activities should nevertheless be covered and assessed in the self-evaluation and external review on the basis of the available processes and documentation.

## II.- Programmes:

- I.1- Authorization of new programmes
- I.2- Follow-up of study programmes
- I.3- Study programmes certification renewal

### **I. 2.2 Other activities relevant to the application by AVAP**

In addition, the self-evaluation report and external review report should address how AVAP checks and ensures ESG compliance when recognising the results of a study programme evaluation carried out by contracted experts i.e. how does the agency ensures experts are trained and briefed; how does the agency ensure the inclusion of students in the group of experts; how are the roles and responsibilities in the group of experts assigned and distributed.

### **0. 2.3 Activities outside the scope of the ESG**

- I- Teaching staff accreditation.

## **3. The review process**

The review will be conducted following the methodology of ENQA Agency Reviews. The process is designed in line with *the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and the requirements of *the EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation and agreement on the Terms of Reference for the review between AVAP, ENQA and EQAR;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by ENQA;
- Notification of EQAR about the appointed panel;
- Self-assessment by AVAP including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AVAP;
- 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;
- Decision making by the EQAR Register Committee on the agency's registration on EQAR;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or the ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

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

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts (at least one of which is currently employed by an ENQA member agency), an academic employed by a higher education institution, a 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.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Review Coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements 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 AVAP with the list of suggested experts and their respective curricula vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the AVAP review.

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

AVAP 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 2 and 3) addressed individually, and considerations of how the agency has addressed the recommendations as noted in the ENQA Board's membership decision letter and the instances of partial compliance noted in the previous EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal. 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 AVAP fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat which has four 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 two weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 EUR 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**

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which shall be submitted to the agency at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule is to include 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 usually 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to AVAP at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted in a site visit by the ENQA Review Coordinator.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency or the granting or reconfirmation 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 concerning each standard of part 2 and 3 of the 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 AVAP usually within 10 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If AVAP chooses to provide a position 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 AVAP and finalise and submit the document to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will normally 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* to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the consideration of the Register Committee of the agency's application to EQAR.

For the purpose of applying for ENQA membership, AVAP is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which AVAP expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be taken into consideration by the Board together with the final evaluation report when deciding on the agency's membership.

### **4. Follow-up process and publication of the report**

AVAP will receive the expert panel's report and publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has approved the report. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. As part of ENQA Agency Review follow-up activities, AVAP commits to react on the review recommendations and submit a follow-up report to the ENQA Board within the timeframe indicated in the Board's decision on membership. 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 could be complemented by a small-scale progress 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 to be of particular importance or a challenge to AVAP. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or judgment of 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 ENQA Board for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether AVAP can be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report is also used as a basis for the

Register Committee's decision on the agency's registration on EQAR. The review process is thus designed to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by ENQA. Once submitted to ENQA and until it is approved by its Board, the report may not be used or relied upon by AVAP, the panel, or any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. The approval of the report is independent of the decision of the ENQA Board on membership.

For the purposes of EQAR registration, the agency will submit the review report (once approved by the ENQA Board) via email to EQAR. The agency should also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF format), a Declaration of Honour, full curriculum vitae (CVs) of all review panel members and any other relevant documents to the application (i.e. annexes, statement to the review report, updates). EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency's application at its Register Committee meeting in November/December 2022.

## 6. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	February 2021
Appointment of review panel members	June 2021
Self-assessment completed	8 October 2021
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator	October 2021
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	December 2021
Briefing of review panel members	December 2021
Review panel site visit	February 2022
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA Review Coordinator for pre-screening	April 2022
Draft of evaluation report to AVAP	April 2022
Statement of AVAP to review panel if necessary	May 2022
Submission of final report to ENQA	May 2022
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board	June 2022
Publication of report	June/July 2022
EQAR Register Committee meeting	November/December 2022

## ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ANECA	National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation
AVAP	Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
QA	Quality Assurance
REACU	Spanish Network for Agencies of University Quality Assurance
SAR	Self-Assessment Report
ToR	Terms of Reference

## ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

### DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AVAP

Self-assessment report

Explanation on the mapping of “Evaluation, assessment, certification and accreditation of university institutions” against the ESG

Revised mapping of QA procedures against the ESG Part I that includes the mapping of authorization against the ESG and for every procedure included in ToR includes two scenarios - current scenario and the scenario when AVAP is listed on EQAR

Collection of documentation samples that are provided to/requested from the reviewer to in order to become involved in assessment procedure

Information about training sessions organised for reviewers by AVAP (number of trainings, number of participants, agenda of the training session)

Explanation on the involvement of professionals in the scientific-technical field of the degrees to be evaluated and/or foreign experts in evaluation processes

Documentation related to the appeal from 2018, as mentioned in the SAR (text of the appeal and supporting documents, full decision)

Explanation on the suggestions, complaints or congratulations received in the AVAP’s mailbox set up for this purpose

Strategic plan 2018 - 2021

Table of all assessment procedures listed in ToR as within the scope of ESG that includes the following sections - title of the procedure, links to full assessment methodology (manual, template for the HEI SAR, template for the expert report etc.), information on who performs the assessment (the general composition of the expert group), information on who produces the assessment report, information on who takes the decision (title and composition of the decision-making body), information on to whom the decision can be appealed to. two scenarios for each QA procedure - current situation and situation when AVAP is listed on EQAR.

A folder for each quality assurance procedure listed in the ToR that includes an example of full documentation of the whole procedure - 1) Self-assessment report prepared by HEI, 2) All related expert reports (interim, final, authorization, verification), 3) Any other documentation used in decision making, 4) Full decision (written)

“Job description” of the President and Director

Programme/timeline for the upcoming thematic analyses to be produced (period, topic/content)

Short profiles of all AVAP staff members - name, workload (full-time, part-time), main duties

Forecast for the increase of human resources (information on the timing, number, tasks that will be assigned to the new staff) for 2022/2023

List of staff development activities that AVAP has organised/used since 2019

Income and expenditure for the last 5 years where expenditure is indicated by positions - salaries, technical equipment, ICT resources etc.

Fee list for quality assurance procedures and explanation on how the fees are calculated

Manual of internal procedures

Preliminary results of the stakeholder survey sent out at the end of 2021

Definition of a conflict of interest

Information on the measures taken to eliminate potential conflict of interest

Information on the information package provided to a) staff member entering into working relationship of AVAP, b) member of governing/ advisory/ decision-making bodies, c) evaluation experts commissioned by AVAP,

Protocol for institutional evaluation (as agreed by REACU)

Protocol for verification procedure (as agreed by REACU)

Protocol for authorization procedure

Protocol for certification renewal procedure

Protocol for follow-up procedure

Protocol for the DOCENTIA programme

Information about DOCENTIA programme (relevant internal AVAP regulations, information about how the collaboration with ANECA works in practice, report about activities/evaluation processes carried out, information about staff and committees that are involved, information about funding allocated)

Screenshots from the e-system used for managing the evaluation processes

Statistics on the negative and positive decisions made since 2017

Statistics on all issues reviewed by the Guarantees Committee (year, title of the institution/programme, short description of the issue, decision taken)

Minutes of the Steering committee and Executive committee of the last two years

#### OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

AVAP website ([www.avap.es](http://www.avap.es))

ANECA website ([www.aneca.es](http://www.aneca.es))

## **ANNEX 5: REGULATIONS OF THE VALENCIAN AGENCY FOR ASSESSMENT AND FORECASTING (AVAP) (DECREE 6/2008)**

The Regulations of the Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting (AVAP) adopted in 2013 stipulate a wide array of functions of the agency:

*“Article 3. Aims and functions:*

*1. AVAP will be responsible for the following general functions in the field of the Valencian business, technological, scientific, university and public services system:*

- a) Accreditation and evaluation of university institutions and faculty and other related activities.*
- b) The evaluation of technology, business, research and development programmes.*
- c) Foresight and analysis of new technological, scientific and university demands of use to the Valencian Community.*
- d) The evaluation and accreditation of the quality of public service providers and institutions, their policies and programmes.*

*2. AVAP shall also have the following specific tasks:*

- a) The accreditation and evaluation of the teaching, research and management activities of university teaching staff, of official courses and their syllabuses, of courses leading to the award of their own degrees, of the teaching, research and management activities of university departments and areas of knowledge, of the activities, programmes, services and management of their own or affiliated university centres, and of the activities, programmes, services and management of their own or affiliated centres that teach under foreign educational systems, and of the programmes, activities and services of the Valencian university system.*
- b) The proposal of measures to improve the quality of the services provided by Valencian public universities, especially teaching and research.*
- c) The prior evaluation of the activity, as required by the Organic Law on Universities, for the recruitment of contract teaching staff where appropriate.*
- d) The prior assessment of the individual teaching, research and management merits of the teaching staff, linked to the singular and individual assignment of the additional salary complements that may be established.*
- e) The evaluation of the teaching staff of private universities in possession of the degree of doctor or doctorate.*
- f) To provide the information relating to its sphere of action required by the Social Councils, the universities, and the public administrations and, in particular, that relating to the creation or suppression of programmes and centres that must be authorised by the Government.*
- g) To report on the educational administration's proposals for the creation or recognition of universities and for the creation, modification or suppression of centres and programmes.*
- h) To promote excellence in higher education in the Region of Valencia through the quality, transparency, comparison, cooperation, and competitiveness of its educational institutions at national and international level.*
- i) To propose the quality objectives for the Valencian university system for the purposes of their financing by the administration and to quantify their degree of compliance by means of indicators.*

- j) *To propose and establish, where appropriate, at the request of the department responsible for universities, an information system to support the coordination, improvement, and monitoring of the Valencian university system.*
- k) *The independent assessment of the quality of the public service provided by higher education, for the purpose of providing information about it to society, to public administrations and to the universities themselves.*
- l) *The evaluation and promotion of the relationship between the university and business with regard to training demand, scientific research needs, technological development and business innovation.*
- m) *The evaluation of projects and grant applications, as well as their results, under the terms provided for in Law 5/2006, of 25 May, of the Government.*
- n) *The evaluation of research, development and technology transfer of the Government's own programmes, research institutes and other scientific research, technological development and business innovation activities. It shall also carry out all those specific functions that may correspond to it in application of state and regional legislation on higher education, universities, the promotion and coordination of scientific research, technological development and business innovation.”*

**ANNEX 6: MAPPING ON HOW THE ESG PART I IS COVERED BY THE ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES CURRENTLY IMPLEMENTED BY AVAP**

	<b>AVAP standards for authorization (initial accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for verification (initial accreditation) after listed on EQAR (as per REACU recommendations)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for certification renewal (accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for follow-up</b>
I.1. Policy for quality assurance	Standard 2. Adequacy of the number of places offered by the university in the degree programme to be implemented, to the demand of its socio-economic environment in order to avoid the oversupply of places and the duplication of costs. Standard 3. Level of employability of graduates Standard 4. Area of influence of the degree, so that the territorial balance is maintained, in terms of the map of degrees, bearing in mind the needs of Valencian society.	New Standard 8. Internal Quality Assurance System	Standard 3. Internal Quality Assurance System. <i>The institution has a formally established and implemented internal quality assurance system that effectively ensures the continuous improvement of the degree</i>	Standard 3. Internal Quality Assurance System. <i>The institution has a formally established and implemented internal quality assurance system that effectively ensures the continuous improvement of the degree</i>
I.2 Design and approval of programmes	Standard 2. Adequacy of the number of places offered by the university in the degree programme to be implemented, to the demand of its socio-economic environment in order to avoid the oversupply of places and the duplication of costs.	New Standard 1. Description, formal objectives and justification of the study programme New Standard 2. Expected outcome of the learning process	Standard 1. Organisation and development. <i>The programme is student-centred, up-to-date and has been implemented in accordance with the conditions set out in the verified report and/or its subsequent modifications</i> Standard 6. Learning outcomes. <i>The learning outcomes achieved by</i>	Standard 1. Organisation and development. <i>The programme is student-centred, up-to-date and has been implemented in accordance with the conditions set out in the verified report and/or its subsequent modifications</i>

	<b>AVAP standards for authorization (initial accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for verification (initial accreditation) after listed on EQAR (as per REACU recommendations)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for certification renewal (accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for follow-up</b>
			<i>graduates are coherent with the graduate profile and correspond to the MECES (Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education) level of the degree.</i>	Standard 6. Learning outcomes. <i>The learning outcomes achieved by graduates are coherent with the graduate profile and correspond to the MECES (Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education) level of the degree.</i>
I.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment		New Standard 4. Planification of the study programme	Standard 1. Organisation and development. <i>The training programme is student-centred, up-to-date and has been implemented in accordance with the conditions set out in the verified report and/or its subsequent modifications</i> Standard 6. Learning outcomes. <i>The learning outcomes achieved by graduates are coherent with the graduate profile and correspond to the MECES (Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education) level of the degree.</i>	Standard 1. Organisation and development. <i>The training programme is student-centred, up-to-date and has been implemented in accordance with the conditions set out in the verified report and/or its subsequent modifications</i> Standard 6. Learning outcomes. <i>The learning outcomes achieved by graduates are coherent with the graduate profile and correspond to the MECES (Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education) level of the degree.</i>
I.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	Standard 2. Adequacy of the number of places offered by the university in the degree	New Standard 3. Admission, recognition and mobility of students	Standard 1. Organisation and development. <i>The training programme is student-centred, up-</i>	Standard 1. Organisation and development. <i>The training programme is student-centred,</i>

	<b>AVAP standards for authorization (initial accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for verification (initial accreditation) after listed on EQAR (as per REACU recommendations)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for certification renewal (accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for follow-up</b>
	<p>programme to be implemented, to the demand of its socio-economic environment in order to avoid the oversupply of places and the duplication of costs.</p> <p>Standard 4. Area of influence of the degree, so that the territorial balance is maintained, in terms of the map of degrees, bearing in mind the needs of Valencian society.</p>		<i>to-date and has been implemented in accordance with the conditions set out in the verified report and/or its subsequent modifications</i>	<i>up-to-date and has been implemented in accordance with the conditions set out in the verified report and/or its subsequent modifications</i>
1.5 Teaching staff	Standard 1. Adequacy of teaching staff to teach the Bachelor's, Master's or doctoral degree to be introduced.	New Standard 5. Teaching and supporting staff	Standard 4. Academic staff. <i>Institutions should ensure the competence of their teaching staff. They should also use fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of their staff.</i>	Standard 4. Academic staff. <i>Institutions should ensure the competence of their teaching staff. They should also use fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of their staff.</i>
1.6 Learning resources and student support		New Standard 6. Learning resources: materials and infrastructures, practices and services New Standard 7. Implementation calendar	Standard 5. Support staff, material resources and services. <i>Institutions should have sufficient funding to develop teaching and learning activities and ensure that students are offered sufficient and easily accessible learning support and resources.</i>	Standard 5. Support staff, material resources and services. <i>Institutions should have sufficient funding to develop teaching and learning activities and ensure that students are offered sufficient</i>

	<b>AVAP standards for authorization (initial accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for verification (initial accreditation) after listed on EQAR (as per REACU recommendations)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for certification renewal (accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for follow-up</b>
				<i>and easily accessible learning support and resources.</i>
I.7 Information management	Standard 2. Adequacy of the number of places offered by the university in the degree programme to be implemented, to the demand of its socio-economic environment in order to avoid the oversupply of places and the duplication of costs. Standard 3. Level of employability of graduates	New Standard 8. Internal Quality Assurance System	Standard 3. Internal Quality Assurance System. <i>The institution has a formally established and implemented internal quality assurance system that effectively ensures the continuous improvement of the degree</i> Standard 7. Satisfaction and performance indicators. <i>The results of the indicators of the training programme are congruent with the design, management and resources made available to the degree and meet the social demands of its environment through periodic evaluation.</i>	Standard 3. Internal Quality Assurance System. <i>The institution has a formally established and implemented internal quality assurance system that effectively ensures the continuous improvement of the degree</i> Standard 7. Satisfaction and performance indicators. <i>The results of the indicators of the training programme are congruent with the design, management and resources made available to the degree and meet the social demands of its environment through periodic evaluation.</i>
I.8 Public information	Standard 2. Adequacy of the number of places offered by the university in the degree programme to be implemented, to the demand of its socio-economic environment in order to avoid the oversupply of	New Standard 8. Internal Quality Assurance System	Standard 2. Information and transparency. <i>Institutions should publish clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and easily accessible information about their activities and programmes.</i>	Standard 2. Information and transparency. <i>Institutions should publish clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and easily accessible information about their activities and programmes.</i>

	<b>AVAP standards for authorization (initial accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for verification (initial accreditation) after listed on EQAR (as per REACU recommendations)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for certification renewal (accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for follow-up</b>
	places and the duplication of costs.			
I.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Standard 3. Level of employability of graduates	New Standard 8. Internal Quality Assurance System	Standard 3. Internal Quality Assurance System. <i>The institution has a formally established and implemented internal quality assurance system that effectively ensures the continuous improvement of the degree</i> Standard 7. Satisfaction and performance indicators. <i>The results of the indicators of the training programme are congruent with the design, management and resources made available to the degree and meet the social demands of its environment through periodic evaluation.</i>	Standard 3. Internal Quality Assurance System. <i>The institution has a formally established and implemented internal quality assurance system that effectively ensures the continuous improvement of the degree</i> Standard 7. Satisfaction and performance indicators. <i>The results of the indicators of the training programme are congruent with the design, management and resources made available to the degree and meet the social demands of its environment through periodic evaluation.</i>
I.10 Cyclical external quality assurance		New Standard 8. Internal Quality Assurance System	Standard 3. Internal Quality Assurance System. <i>The institution has a formally established and implemented internal quality assurance system that effectively ensures the continuous improvement of the degree</i>	Standard 3. Internal Quality Assurance System. <i>The institution has a formally established and implemented internal quality assurance system that effectively ensures</i>

	<b>AVAP standards for authorization (initial accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for verification (initial accreditation) after listed on EQAR (as per REACU recommendations)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for certification renewal (accreditation)</b>	<b>AVAP standards for follow-up</b>
			Standard 7. Satisfaction and performance indicators. <i>The results of the indicators of the training programme are congruent with the design, management and resources made available to the degree and meet the social demands of its environment through periodic evaluation.</i>	<i>the continuous improvement of the degree</i> Standard 7. Satisfaction and performance indicators. <i>The results of the indicators of the training programme are congruent with the design, management and resources made available to the degree and meet the social demands of its environment through periodic evaluation.</i>

## ENQA AGENCY REVIEW 2022

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting (AVAP), undertaken in 2022.

**enqa.**

European Association for  
Quality Assurance in Higher Education