

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

**Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

August 2015

**1. Background and Context**

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

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

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

ACPUA values:

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

At the end of 2014, the Aragon Parliament approved an important legal modification to the Aragon Higher Education Act. This reform was aimed at consolidating the student participation in ACPUA's structure as well as to reinforce the Agency's accountability and transparency mechanisms in

accordance with the latest update of the European Standards and Guidelines, and had been proposed to the Aragon Government by the Agency's Governing Body.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The following EQA of ACPUA have to be addressed in the external review:

- Programme accreditations:
  - Study programme initial accreditation\*
  - Study programme accreditation
  - Study programme follow up
- Institutional evaluations:
  - University research institutes initial accreditation
  - University research institutes accreditation
  - Training schools certification
  - Higher education institutions initial accreditation\*
  - DOCENTIA Programme: Teaching activity evaluation system audit
  - Teaching staff evaluation system audit
  - Partner HEI evaluation
- Consultancy: support to decision making process

Important notes:

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

## **3. The Review Process**

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

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

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

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

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

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

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

ENQA will provide ACPUA with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the ACPUA review.

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

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

- Self-evaluation is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-evaluation report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which ACPUA fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.

- The self-evaluation report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-evaluation report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the ENQA Guidelines for External Review of Quality Assurance Agencies, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-evaluation report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

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

ACPUA will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to ACPUA at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

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

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

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to ACPUA within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If ACPUA chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by ACPUA, finalise the document and submit it to ACPUA and ENQA.

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

ACPUA is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which ACPUA expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

## **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

ACPUA will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. ACPUA commits to preparing a follow-up plan in

which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by ACPUA. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

## 5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

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

Should the review report be used for applying to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), the Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

## 6. Budget

ACPUA shall pay the following review related fees:

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

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

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

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

## 7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Appointment of review panel members	August 2015
Agreement on terms of reference	October 5 2015
Self-evaluation completed	October 2015
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	October/November 2015
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	October/November 2015
Briefing of review panel members	January 2016
Review panel site visit	February 2016
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	April 2016
Draft of evaluation report to ACPUA	April 2016
Statement of ACPUA to review panel if necessary	Early May 2016
Submission of final report to ENQA	May 2016
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of ACPUA	June 2016
Publication of report	June/July 2016