



PROGRESS REPORT

AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE GALICIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM (ACSUG)

Santiago de Compostela, 30 September 2021

1) INTRODUCTION

ACSUG, a full member of ENQA since 2009, underwent until now three external review processes (2009, 2014 and 2019), all of them with a positive result in the substantial compliance of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

This progress report is elaborated with the purpose of showing a general overview of the work of ACSUG since the last external review in 2019. The content of the report includes comments on the suggestions and recommendations from the review panel and the ENQA Board, other substantial changes since the last review and key challenges for the future.

2) COMMENTS ON THE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REVIEW PANEL AND THE ENQA BOARD

ESG 2.1. Consideration of internal quality assurance

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel encourages ACSUG to follow up on translating the ESG 2015 to Galician to increase their visibility.*

Comments by ACSUG: ACSUG has already made the translation of the ESG 2015 to Galician. Currently it is in development the laying out of the document, in order to publish it as soon as possible.

ESG 2.2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel suggests that ACSUG could explore whether and how they can devolve more of the operational aspects of responsibilities in quality assurance to universities to advance their quality culture, and support universities to further develop qualitative and effective approach to quality assurance processes.*

Comments by ACSUG: The trend in Spain (also in Galicia) is to shift towards the institutional accreditation rather than the programme approach existing until now. ACSUG is convinced that this change is going to remark the responsibility of the universities due to the increasing importance of the internal quality assurance systems (IQAS) in the institutional evaluations.

As it was explained in the self-assessment report of the last review, among the 82 universities in Spain, only 10 met the two requirements to carry out the institutional accreditation of centres (possession of renewed ex-post accreditation of at least half of the official Bachelor's and Master's degrees and certification of the implementation of its internal quality assurance system). Among these 10 are the three universities in Galicia (UDC, USC and UVI).

The following table shows the current data regarding this topic.

| UNIVERSITY | NUMBER OF CENTRES | CENTRES CERTIFIED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IQAS | CENTRES WITH INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION |
|------------|-------------------|---|--|
| UDC | 26 | 12 | 8 |
| USC | 29 | 12 | 8 |
| UVI | 29 | 17 | 13 |

ESG 2.3. Designing methodologies fit for purpose

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel encourages the agency to implement the 2018 evaluation guide for international evaluation processes based on the 2015 ESG.*

Comments by ACSUG: Until now, there are no evidences of the use of the updated guidelines due to the lack of new processes in the last two years. In all the requests of foreign universities during this time, they have been informed that [the current guidelines can be consulted in the ACSUG Website in the section of International Evaluation and Certification](#).

Some processes (for example one with the Costa Rica University) are still in an initial stage (signature of agreements and starting of the self-assessment), so the effectiveness and usability of the updated guidelines could be checked in the future.

ACSUG is developing a new procedure for submitting information by the foreign universities, making use of the application already in functioning for the evaluations carried out in Galicia. In this way, the management of all the international evaluation processes is going to be simplified and more effective.

ESG 2.4. Peer-review experts

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel encourages the agency to pursue its efforts to increase the involvement of international experts in the panels.*

Comments by ACSUG: Currently, [there are three international experts collaborating with ACSUG](#): one in the Engineering and Architecture committee, one in the Arts and Humanities committee and another in the Social and Legal Sciences panel.

The aim of ACSUG is to include, at least, one international expert in each evaluation panel for degrees (divided in the five branches of knowledge), so it is necessary to continue appointing international experts.

One drawback for selecting international experts is that they need to have good skills in Spanish, because the documentation during all the process is in Spanish.

Nevertheless, ACSUG is seeking experts that fulfil this requirement and it is expected to have new appointments very soon.

It is remarkable that with the increase of online evaluations and meetings, the problem of having experts from far places (due to the arrangements for travelling) is being reduced.

ESG 2.6. Reporting

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel suggests adapting the structure of self-evaluation reports and external evaluation reports to stimulate a more self-critical and analytical approach in evaluation reports.*

Comments by ACSUG: The universities should include always a self-assessment in the reports, with a critical reflexion of its activities and the performance of them. From ACSUG this issue is highly considered and it is highlighted in the preliminary and final reports (as strong points or as areas for improvement).

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel suggests adapting the database for reports of evaluation to include the English name of joint and inter-university degrees to increase their visibility.*

Comments by ACSUG: In this item is it rather relevant the participation of ACSUG in the DEQAR project, where the degrees, regardless their type, have all the information in English. [The DEQAR database](#) includes all the reports of degrees (and centres) issued by the Quality Assurance Agencies in Europe.

In the [degrees database in the ACSUG Website](#) the names of joint and inter-university degrees with foreign universities are going to be also in English.

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel suggests exploring ways to further disseminate information and data in reports to stakeholders such as students, parents and employers*

Comments by ACSUG: ACSUG is continuing with the development of the labour insertion studies in which relevant information for all the university stakeholders and the society in general is shown. [The reports are published in the ACSUG website](#) and events are always organised to present the main findings. The last event (with the presence of media) took place in March 2020 (<http://www.acsug.es/en/novas2020>).

The ACSUG database for external reports in the ACSUG Website is accessible for all the website users with a link in the main section of the site. It is relevant to remark again the participation of ACSUG in the DEQAR database making visible the degrees of the Galician University System.

ESG 2.7. Complaints and appeals

Recommendation from the review panel and the ENQA Board: *The panel recommends using an independent committee or body to evaluate appeals of decisions made by the CGIACA before starting the jurisdictional procedure.*

Comments by ACSUG: ACSUG is going to create a specific committee to deal with the evaluation appeals. The structure and composition of this new body is been discussing in the meetings of the CGIACA (decision-making body of ACSUG). It is expected that before the end of 2021 the body is created and in operation.

ESG 3.1. Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel suggests ACSUG might consider taking actions to stimulate universities to take a whole-of institution perspective on quality assurance, devising appropriate methods for external evaluation of the effectiveness of implementation of such a perspective*

Comments by ACSUG: With respect to this suggestion and, for not repeating content, ACSUG wants to emphasize the comments already made in the ESG 2.2. As a result, the responsibility of the universities in the task of checking its own functioning is radically more relevant nowadays (and in the future) with the importance of the internal quality assurance systems.

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel suggests including a strategy for all activities in the Strategic Plan, also the international evaluations and collaborations.*

Comments by ACSUG: The topic of international evaluations and collaborations have been already included in the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, even with a specific section. Nevertheless, in the new Strategy 2021-2025, ACSUG is going to remark its compromise with the internationalisation and the procedures to put in practice in this field.

ESG 3.3. Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel suggests appointing non-Galician members in all the agency's governing and evaluations bodies; this could be a way to further enhance ACSUGs' independence.*

Recommendation from the review panel: *ACSUG is recommended to appoint non-Galician members in all the agency's governing and evaluations bodies, which would be a way to further enhance ACSUGs' independence.*

Comments by ACSUG: Until now, ACSUG has not appointed yet non-Galicia members for the Governing body and for the main evaluation body (CGIACA). There are only non-Galician members in the Advisory Council.

ACSUG is aware of this situation and different ways of solving that are being explored in order to not go against what it is established in the ACSUG statutes and other legislation applicable.

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel suggests setting procedures for the selection of the director of the agency, president of the Governing Board and president of the CGIACA based on professional competence and prior experience.*

Comments by ACSUG: The selection procedure of the aforementioned positions is established in the ACSUG statutes. In the statutes, it is said that the three positions (Articles 21, 13 and 23) are covered considering professional competence and prior experience.

Suggestion from the review panel: *The panel suggests putting procedures in place in order to cover personnel vacancies independent from the public administration on a temporary basis, until staff positions are created and filled through public procedures.*

Comments by ACSUG: ACSUG has certain restrictions to hire external staff out from public procedures by budget control. For example, since September 2019 an external expert in the field of documentation and files has been working with ACSUG with the aim of organizing the files. However, this way of proceeding cannot be used regularly.

Therefore, the only way to cover personnel vacancies (even on a temporary basis) is to communicate the necessities to the Department of Human Resources of the Galician Government. In this department, there is a public list of candidates and any of them can apply for the required position. The whole procedure is somehow bureaucratic and for some specific positions it is rather difficult to find suitable staff.

ESG 3.4. Thematic analysis

Recommendation from the review panel and the ENQA Board: *The panel recommends that the agency develop their thematic analysis based on the data they gather in their external quality assurance activities.*

Recommendation from the review panel and the ENQA Board: *The panel recommends that, pending the appointment of additional staff, the agency explore options for outsourcing the work of thematic analysis.*

Comments by ACSUG: ACSUG is fully aware that the topic of thematic analysis is still a weak point.

Until now, the daily work in the agency has made impossible that the ACSUG staff can develop thematic analysis activities.

The idea of launching external working groups to develop thematic analysis (similar to the labour insertion group that it has been working with ACSUG since a few years ago) requires that someone of the ACSUG staff act as a coordinator in the working group in order to control the job, and this is also a time consuming task.

The problem of thematic analysis is not a particularity of ACSUG and it is shared by all the quality assurance agencies in Spain. As a result, the REACU (Spanish Network of agencies) has been organising different thematic activities in some specific fields

(nursery, education, journalism, audio-visual communication or telecommunications and computer engineering) in the last few years. All the quality assurance agencies participate in the gathering of information in its scope of action. Afterwards a specific event (until now all of them online) is organised regarding each field ([Example of the event about journalism, and audio-visual communication the 16th June 2021](#)). All of this information is going to be used for elaborating thematic reports that will be published and distributed by all the quality assurance agencies of Spain.

ESG 3.5. Resources

Recommendation from the review panel and the ENQA Board: *The panel recommends that the agency continue to work to solve the issues related to the vacancies with the ministry in order to ensure full staffing as soon as possible.*

Comments by ACSUG: ACSUG has already covered two of the three vacancies (one of them in June 2019 and the other in July 2019). Someone did not cover the other vacancy until January 2021. A person started to work but, unfortunately, only until September 2021. Therefore, currently there is again one position pending.

Once all the vacancies are covered, a new analysis of the staff organisational chart is going to be done in order to adequate the number and type of staff to the current ACSUG activities.

Recommendation from the review panel and the ENQA Board: *The panel recommends that the agency uses its unused funds to creatively outsource some work, for example the translation of the ESG to Galician and thematic analysis*

Comments by ACSUG: ACSUG outsources some activities, for example the translation of documents to Galician and English. In the case of other activities (for example the thematic analysis), the problem is that ACSUG staff are still needed to coordinate the activities and the current workload makes it difficult.

Recommendation from the review panel and the ENQA Board: *The panel recommends recruiting experts from outside of Galicia for all its governing and evaluation bodies.*

Comments by ACSUG: This recommendation is also included in the ESG 3.3, so please consult in that section the comments made.

ESG 3.6. Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Recommendation from the review panel and the ENQA Board: *The panel recommends the agency to develop a policy for equal opportunity that also guards against intolerance or any kind of discrimination, which covers the agency and all its activities.*

Comments by ACSUG: ACSUG has analysed all the information already included in its statutes, code of ethics, strategic plan, quality policy, procedure for experts' selection and other documents regarding the topic of equal opportunity.

As a result, ACSUG is going to stress specifically its commitment with the equal opportunity and against any kind of discrimination. Therefore, in the new ACSUG code of ethics and in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, this topic it is going to be remarked.

3) OTHER SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE LAST REVIEW

a) Consequences of the COVID-19 in ACSUG

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a great impact in the ACSUG activities. The main issues are briefly highlighted below:

- In the initial stage of the pandemic (from March 2020 to June 2020), all the ACSUG staff worked from home. Then a mixed system of teleworking and in-person work has been implemented. In the first moment, there were some technical difficulties (due to the unpredictability of the health situation) but during this time, ACSUG has been improving progressively the conditions for telecommuting (remote connection to the office computers, improvement of tools for online meetings, etc.).
- ACSUG has been in permanent contact with the three Galician Universities and the Galician Government in order to act properly according to health situation in each moment. [Firstly, an initial communication was published in the ACSUG website to solve the initial doubts.](#) After that, it was necessary to continue with the evaluation visits in online mode. For that purpose, [new evaluation protocols were developed and published.](#) It is relevant to remark that, until now, ACSUG has not come back yet to the on-site visits and different possibilities are being considered for the future (depending on the health situation).

b) ACSUG member of INQAAHE

ACSUG is a member of INQAAHE since October 2020. During this time, ACSUG has been participating in all the activities and meetings organised by INQAAHE (For example in the [2021 online INQAAHE Conference](#)). ACSUG is going to attend in-person (the 7th and 8th October 2021) in Barcelona [the celebratory event of the INQAAHE 30th Anniversary](#)

The participation of ACSUG in INQAAHE is important in order to make more visible the agency at international level and it is a way of continuing with the actions to establish relationships and exchange information with other quality agencies and organizations related to university education.

4) KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

a) Creation of the first private university based in Galicia.

Very recently [it was approved the creation of the first private university based in Galicia](#). This is a new scenario in the Higher Education in Galicia and it is going to have an impact of course in ACSUG, as the entity with competence in quality assessment, within the framework of the Autonomous Community of Galicia.

In Spain, the private universities are assessed following the same procedures as the public universities and its evaluation is compulsory. Therefore, ACSUG is going to be the body responsible for evaluating the faculties and degrees of this new private university, with an expectable increase in the agency workload.

b) Change of ACSUG facilities.

ACSUG is going to change its facilities to a new building in the “Ciudad de la Cultura” in Santiago de Compostela. This supposes obviously a great change after almost 20 years in the same headquarters.

ACSUG have had the possibility of making certain suggestions for the new office in order to adapt the facilities according to the ACSUG necessities.

The building is in the last construction stage, so it is expected the change in the following months.

c) Recent publication of a new Royal Decree (822/2021) of university education in Spain.

On 29 September 2021 it was published the [822/2021 Royal Decree, of 28 September, which establishes the organization of university education and the procedure for quality assurance](#). The approval of this Royal Decree implies that the previous one (Royal Decree 1393/2007) is obsoleted.

The publication of this new Royal Decree requires an analysis of all the guidelines and procedures in ACSUG in order to adapt them.

In the progress visit, this topic could be discussed further, once ACSUG have enough time to analyse properly the new legislation.