

ENQA AGENCY REVIEW

THE CANARIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION (ACCUEE)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present report is the result of the external review of the Canarian Agency for Quality Assessment & Accreditation (Agencia Canaria de Calidad Universitaria y evaluación educativa, ACCUEE), undertaken in June 2022 for the first external review of the Agency's against the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) 2015* and applying for membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) as well as registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The external review against the ESG followed the methodology described in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews 2021. The external review was conducted between November 2021 and September 2022. It started with the process of a production of a self-assessment report (SAR) by ACCUEE, followed by a briefing meeting with ENQA and EQAR and a site-visit of 3 full days by the experts panel during which all the relevant stakeholders involved in ACCUEE's processes were interviewed.

The following ACCUEE's activities under the scope of the ESGs were addressed during the external review:

- ✓ Monitoring of study programmes
- ✓ Ex-post accreditation of study programmes
- ✓ Future activities for the ex-ante accreditation of study programmes and Docentia, to some extent and solely in those cases where the panel had sufficient information regarding compliance with ESG. As for the time of the external review these activities are not yet carried out by the Agency.

ACCUEE is a well-established and recognized Agency in the Canary Islands and in Spain where it operates. Its activity and criteria are legally established, and the procedures are defined by REACU, the national network of Quality Assurance Agencies, and adapted to the region by the Agency. All stakeholders have a good level of satisfaction with ACCUEE's work in general. Nevertheless, the Agency faces two major issues that led to partial compliance regarding complaints and appeals and independence.

The purpose of this report is to advise the ENQA Board and EQAR on the compliance of the Agency with each of the ESG, but also to provide recommendations to ACCUEE to facilitate improvement of its activities in quality assurance in higher education.

The panel considers ACCUEE to comply with the following standards:

- 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance
- 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose
- 2.3 Implementing processes
- 2.4 Peer-review experts
- 2.5 Criteria for Outcomes
- 2.6 Reporting
- 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance
- 3.2 Official status
- 3.4 Thematic analysis

3.5 Resources

3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

In the light of all the information provided, the panel considers the Agency to be partially compliant with the following standards:

2.7 Complaints and Appeals

3.3 Independence

The panel concludes that ACCUEE is in compliance with the ESG.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Canarian Agency for Quality Assessment & Accreditation (Agencia Canaria de Calidad Universitaria y Evaluación Educativa, ACCUEE) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted between November 2021 and September 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 ACCUEE's first external review, the panel is 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, particularly in relation with the future activities.

The Agency is also applying for its registration in EQAR.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The scope of the external review is the application for ENQA membership and EQAR registration. Therefore, this external review will analyse all the agency's activities that fall under the scope of the ESG. The following activities of study programmes of the Agency are addressed in this external review:

- Monitoring of study programmes:
- Ex-post accreditation of study programmes

Future activities for ex ante accreditation of study programmes and docentia (to support evaluations of teaching activities) were included in the assessment only to the extent that the panel had sufficient information to assess the ESG. These two activities are not yet being conducted by the agency. Ex-ante accreditation will apply the Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU) and the University Commission for the Regulation of follow-up and renewal of accreditation (CURSA) protocols (see reference in the section "Quality Assurance below).

The expert group states that for the sake of clarity, the three steps of accreditation of study programmes are referred to in the external review report as follows: 1) Ex-ante accreditation (in the SAR: verification, implementation, authorization of new programmes, ex-ante verification); 2) Monitoring, and 3) Ex-post accreditation (in the SAR: renewal of accreditation, accreditation, accreditation renewing).

For Docentia, a voluntary process not linked to EQAR registration, an agreement with the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain ANECA has been signed in January 2022 and published in the Official State Gazette on the 15th of February. This agreement states that ACCUEE can apply the Docentia protocol in the Canary Islands but will not do so until the Agency can have its own Technical Committee (TC) in charge of these evaluations. The aim is to put it in place by 2023 and, in the meantime, ANECA will continue carrying this out.

Activities related to accreditation at institutional level are not yet carried out by the Agency. Nevertheless, the methodology being applied for institutional procedures are those defined at

national level. Currently the Agency does not have an agreement or even a draft procedure for the Canary Islands on Audit, Institutional accreditation, and Evaluation for the authorization of universities and university centers:

- **Evaluation for the authorization of universities and university centers:** it will be carried out by the Agency in the future as it is, by now, at a stage of a legal requirement only, based on the Royal Decree 640/2021 of July 27. At the time of the review, there is no draft for the process, procedures and criteria that will be applied in this framework.

- **Audit:** this evaluation process, aiming at the promotion of the development and implementation of internal quality assurance systems, will be based on ANECA's protocol. By now, it is not a priority for ACCUEE and there is not yet any agreement between both Agencies regarding this process. As mentioned before, ACCUEE has currently only an agreement with ANECA for Docentia.

- **Institutional accreditation:** this process aims at facilitating the renewal of accreditation for study programmes. The Royal Decree 640/2021 of July 27 states that if a university center have renewed accreditation for at least half of its study programmes and have the Audit certified for implementation of their internal quality assurance systems, an Institution can apply to the institutional accreditation. At present, ACCUEE is in a general discussion process on how the Agency will implement this procedure in the future. It will be based on the national protocol that is currently under construction within the REACU framework.

Therefore, for the Institutional accreditation and the Evaluation for the authorization of universities and university centers and Audit, the panel was not in the position to assess the compliance with the ESG, since currently processes, procedures and criteria are not yet drafted or defined.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PREVIOUS REVIEW

In 2007, the Agency applied for ENQA membership against the ESG 2005, and membership was not granted. Given the fact that this review was based on a completely different methodology and on the 2005 ESG, there are no findings that can be referred to in this review. Thus, there is no reference to previous findings in this report.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2021-2022 external review of ACCUEE was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews 2021* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference (ToRs). The panel for the external review of ACCUEE was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Maria E. WEBER (Chair), Head of Department for Accreditation / International Contacts at AQ Austria; Austria
- Vanessa DUCLOS (Secretary), Head of Accreditations at emlyon business school, France;
- Paolo CHERUBINI, Full Professor at University of Milan-Bicocca, Italy (EUA nominee);
- Francisco Joaquin JIMENEZ GONZALEZ – Master student in Science and Technology in Architecture at Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, Spain (ESU nominee)

Anaïs Gourdin, Senior Project Manager at ENQA, acted as coordinator of the entire process. Her support before, during and after the visit has been highly appreciated by the panel.

The review process has been carried out as established by the ENQA procedure comprising the nomination of the panel members, production of a SAR by the Agency, a site-visit (hold onsite, except for one panel member and some interviewees), and finally an external review report sent to ACCUEE to comment on any factual error they may detect in the draft.

Based on the information provided in the SAR and the interviews with the stakeholders, and as well through the additional requested evidence provided before and during the site-visit, the panel could ultimately reach, for each of the ESG, consensus in judgements on compliance by the end of the visit.

Finally, the result of the process is the present external report (ERR) drafted by the review Secretary in cooperation with the Chair and panel members. It is submitted to the EQAR Register Committee for initial consideration and to the ENQA Board to enable its members to assess the ESG compliance of ACCUEE.

Self-assessment report

Approximately 1,5 months before the site-visit and prior to the submission of the SAR to the review panel, the report was screened by ENQA's coordinator.

ACCUEE's SAR, comprising 76 pages (plus Annexes) in length, was sent to the panel including documents intended to serve as more detailed information and as evidence in support of statements made in the report.

The SAR was produced by a group of 2 ACCUEE staff members forming the working group responsible for the preparation of the self-assessment report (both with an extended knowledge of the Agency's activities). This group acted with the support of all ACCUEE's departments who could provide and review the information on their own activities. Stakeholders have been largely involved in the self-assessment process: before the writing of the report through a survey and during the writing of the report through consultations by e-mail, jointly with an evaluation of the SAR sent to HEIs.

The review panel considered the SAR as informative. The review panel particularly appreciated the auto-detection of areas for improvement highlighted throughout the document. To support all the information provided, 3 annexes were forwarded to the panel as evidence at the end of the SAR, in addition to a series of links all along the report. As usual in an external review, a series of additional annexes had to be requested to the Agency.

To support the Agency's future external reviews, the panel likes to address some areas for consideration and improvement. The panel is convinced that, in order to provide future panels sound information at a glance but also to reduce additional work while investing into additional research regarding information needed, the SAR should contain:

1. Only functioning links and core information / important documentation should be provided in English translation. These would allow a better understanding of the key elements of the working remit of the Agency. Lots of information and documents required some interpretation during the visit.
2. Full information should be included, e.g. the description of the Spanish Higher Education System and information on Quality Assurance in general, that were not in the SAR.

Nonetheless, clarification was accomplished in the course of the evaluation process through further information gathered during the site visit and through analysis of the reality of ACCUEE's operations as well as by additional research carried out by the panel members.

Site visit

The visit for the external review of ACCUEE took place on June 15, 16 and 17 with a pre-visit meeting organized on June 3. Most panel members were able to travel to Santa Cruz de Tenerife in Spain, except one panel member due to the pandemic situation. The visit took place in the offices of the Agency. The Agency provided all the facilities to the panel member online to join the panel's meetings as well as interviews (with the tool Webex). The support by the ENQA coordinator during the whole visit was fundamental to supervise the technical and general aspects linked to this type of hybrid exercise.

The panel met the different stakeholders linked to the Agency's activities, namely:

- ACCUEE's director
- ACCUEE's staff
- ACCUEE's governing body
- Representatives of the Canarian Ministry of Education
- A representative of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA)
- Experts involved in the different external quality assurance processes
- Higher Education Institutions' representatives (Heads of Institutions on the one hand and Quality persons on the other hand)

The above-mentioned stakeholders represented all ACCUEE's activities under the scope of the present review. The panel appreciated their availability at the time to attend and to answer questions as well as the usefulness of all the interviews during the three full-day interviews.

The support provided by ACCUEE's staff both before and throughout the site-visit is to be underlined. The logistical arrangements were adapted to the situation and visit methodology. The information requested before and during the visit was provided quickly. The panel do confirm the predisposition of ACCUEE to provide an answer to all types of requests as well as their kindness and professionalism throughout the process.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

a) Higher Education System in Spain

The general policy on Higher Education in Spain is based on the Organic Law 6/2001 of December 21, amended by the Organic Law 4/2007 of April 12. This law aims at promoting the action of the State in the structuring of the Spanish university system, at intensifying the competencies of the Autonomous Communities with regards to their responsibilities on higher education and at increasing the degree of autonomy of universities. It states that basic regulations on Higher Education are defined at the national level, while the responsibility on the implementation of the national policy is the responsibility of the Autonomous Communities. Organic Laws are translated into Royal Decrees which regulate the official Higher Education in the country and regional Organic Laws and Decrees at autonomous level.

Based on the data published by the Spanish government in the report “Data and Numbers of the Spanish Higher Education System¹” published in 2022, the 17 Autonomous Communities count 84 Higher Education Institutions, 50 are public and 34 are private. It represents 1067 schools and faculties (called centers), 542 research institutes, 52 doctoral schools, 56 university hospitals and 77 foundations. During the academic year 2020-21, 1 679 518 students were enrolled, 80% of them at a bachelor level. The number has increased by 2,8% compared to the previous year.

The Higher Education System is based on the Bologna three-cycle structure with Bachelor degrees of 180 to 240 ECTS, Master degrees of 60 to 120 ECTS and Doctoral degrees, with levels responding to the descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework (MECES). In 2020-21, there were 3062 bachelors (73,3% in public universities), 3613 Masters (75,9% in public universities) and 1173 Doctoral study programmes (90,4% in public universities). At all levels, the two most covered academic fields are Social and Legal Sciences and Engineering & Architecture.

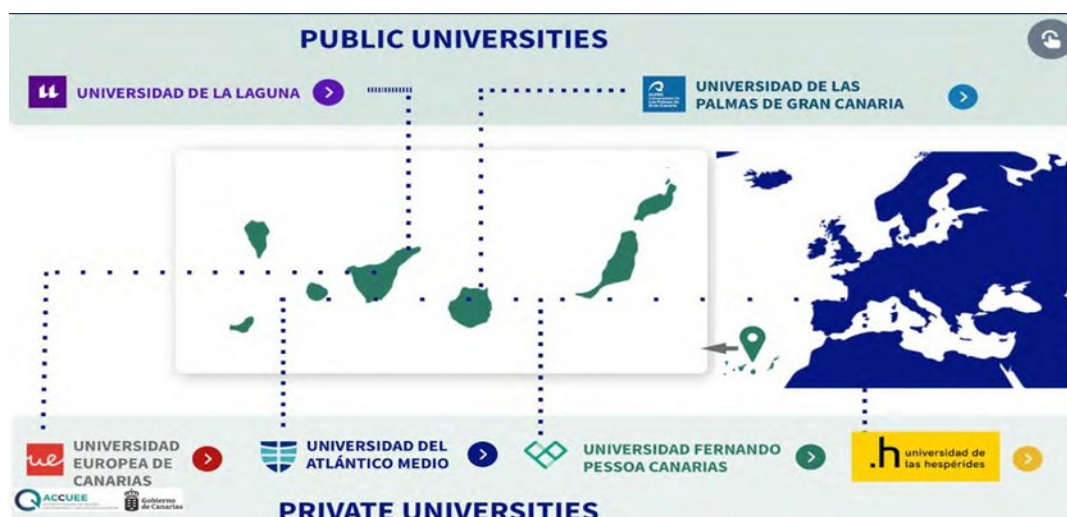
b) Higher Education System in the Canary Islands

The Law 1/2018 of 5 November states that “it is the responsibility of the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands, respecting the academic self-governance of universities, to enact law concerning higher education” and particularly with regards to quality assessment, quality assurance and excellence in higher education and defines, in its paragraph 2 the following activities:

- Program and coordinate the university system in the Canary Islands
- Create public universities and authorize private universities
- Approve the statutes of public universities and the rules concerning the organisation and procedures of private universities
- Coordinate university access processes
- Regulate the legal framework governing universities’ own qualifications
- Fund universities, using its own general budget and manage any funds approved by the central Government
- Regulate and manage the system used to provide regional university grants and financial assistance
- Approve the salary of contractual academic and research staff at universities and set additional remuneration for tenured academic staff.

Today, the Canary Islands hold 6 universities, 2 are public and 4 are private (one of which is digital-only):

¹ Data and Numbers of the Spanish Higher Education System 2022:
https://www.universidades.gob.es/stfls/universidades/Estadisticas/ficheros/DyC_2021_22.pdf



Source: self-assessment report, page 11

It represents 6,23% of the total number of universities in Spain. In 2021-22, they offer 111 bachelor degrees, 145 Master degrees and 34 doctoral degrees with a total of 44267 students (36707 at bachelor level, 4581 at master level and 1979 at doctoral level, aligned with the national ratio with around 84% of students enrolled at bachelor level).

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality Assurance in Spain is defined in the Organic Laws previously mentioned and is the competency of the 10 established regional accreditation Agencies located in the following Autonomous Communities: Andalusia, Aragon, Balearic Islands, Canary Islands, Castile & Leon, Catalonia, Madrid Community, Valencian Community, Galicia and Basque Country and, in addition, the National Quality Assurance Agency (ANECA) with an overall role.

ANECA is responsible for evaluating the study programmes and institutions in the 7 Autonomous Communities without an established Agency. In addition, ANECA is also responsible for activities that Autonomous Agencies cannot carry out without being an ENQA member and EQAR registered as stated in relevant Decrees.

Since ACCUEE is in its first external review process against the ESG 2015 it is not yet authorized by the Law to run ex-ante accreditation of study programmes and institutional accreditation. In case of a positive outcome of this external review, the Agency will be able to develop and implement those activities.

According to the decentralized structure of external quality assurance in Spain, two mechanisms are in place to guarantee harmonization of processes and procedures and safeguard implementation along the Country:

- **The Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (REACU)**, founded in 2009, is a network of the Quality Assurance Agencies (QAA) that plays an important role in the coordination of the evaluation processes and activities carried out by the member Agencies. ACCUEE is an active member of REACU. One of the main roles of REACU is to draft the general guidelines and protocols that are subsequently adopted by CURSA (see below) and the various Agencies, who apply and adapt it to their regional context. It is an institutionalized network promoting a dialogue on the main QA activities and exchange on good practices among its members.

- **The University Commission for the Regulation of follow-up and renewal of accreditation (CURSA)** considered being a technical commission, was created in 2010. CURSA is composed by senior representatives of the (various) Ministries of Education, Directors general of Autonomous Communities, universities, ANECA and regional QAAs. Only 4 Agencies are members, and currently ACCUEE is not a member. Its functions are related to study programme accreditation; CURSA's main role is to agree on guidelines and protocols for the process of monitoring programmes and ex-post accreditation as well as to propose solutions to problems of interpretation arising in these procedures.

Both bodies, the REACU with a non-official and CURSA with an official mandate, hold a core role in safeguarding the consistency of all external quality assurance methodologies implemented and carried out by the 11 Agencies in Spain.

ACCUEE

The *Agencia Canaria de Calidad Universitaria y Evaluación Educativa (ACCUEE)* was established, in its current structure, in 2012 with the regional Law 4/2012 of June 25. It replaced both the *Canarian Institute of Quality Assurance (ICEC)* established by Law in 1990 and the *Canary Islands Agency for Quality Assurance and Assessment in Higher Education (ACECAU)* established in 2002. ACECAU was the predecessor of ACCUEE who underwent a review against the ESG 2005 in 2007.

ACCUEE encompassed the scope of activities of both previous organisations and took over responsibilities on the university and non-university sector, including infant, primary and secondary education, vocational education, and higher education.

ACCUEE is an autonomous administrative body with its own legal entity whose main objectives are to:

- a) Assure excellence and objectivity at all levels of the Canary Islands' education system. This shall be achieved by obeying approved criteria that have been established by officially recognised education and research QAAs at international and European levels.
- b) Assure quality of the HE system in the Canary Islands. This shall be achieved by ensuring all targets set forth in Article 37.7 of Organic Law 6/2007, dated 27 December, on universities are met.

In its mission ACCUEE refers therefore subsequently to ensuring “*quality in both university and non-university education in the Canary Islands, thus contributing to continuous improvement which, in turn, generates value for wider society*”.

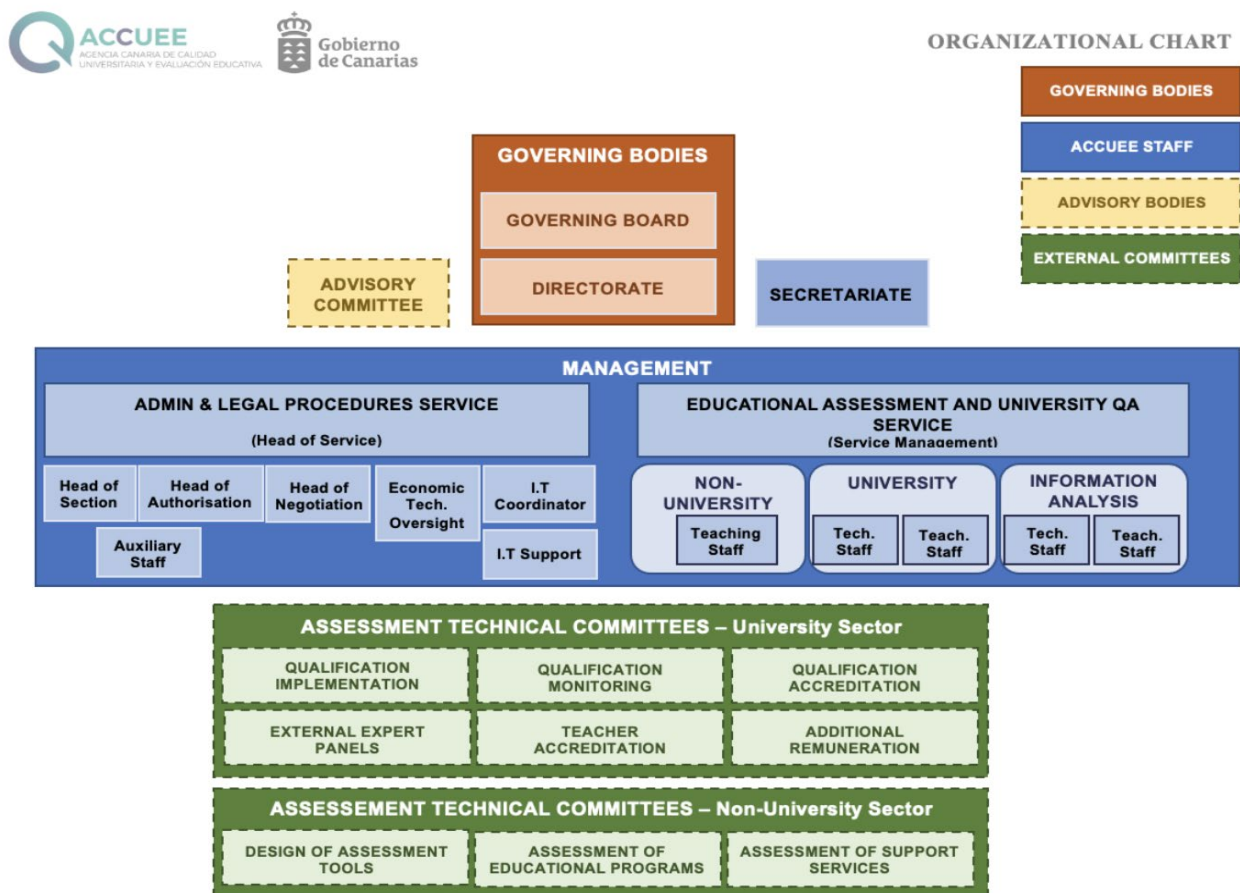
In terms of its vision, ACCUEE “*aspires to be a flagship institution in the quality assurance area in university and non-university education. Through its activities, its aim is to help create and foster the ideal conditions under which educational institutions in the Canary Islands might reach their full potential. To achieve this, it shall respect internationally recognised quality assurance standards for international organisation and management processes*”.

The Agency has defined its guiding principles, based on its main objectives and mission:

- Respect the autonomy and diversity of universities
- Collaboration with stakeholders involved in university and non- university education
- Transparency regarding management processes and autonomy from the state
- Adherence to the Code of Ethics to ensure rigor when undertaking mandated functions
- Commitment to excellence in all its activities

ACCUEE'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

ACCUEE's organisational structure is detailed as follows:



Source: SAR, page 17

Only the directorate, secretariat and the departments dedicated to administration and legal affairs as well as to educational assessment & university services are staff of the Agency (24 in total, detailed under ESG 3.5).

The **Governing Board (GB)** for the university sector is the supervisory body of ACCUEE. Its core function is to ensure that objectives defined for the Agency are reached. It is responsible for:

- Establishing and proposing the policies and strategic objectives of ACCUEE
- Approving the Agency's annual and multi-annual action plans
- Approving the economic and accounting documentation of the Agency, within the framework of its budget allocation
- Approving the creation of specific Commissions or Working Groups
- Approving the evaluation protocols for the evaluation and accreditation activities
- Approving the criteria for the carrying out of actions, studies and reports

The GB is composed of 12 members with different backgrounds: 4 representatives of the ministries (2 from the regional Ministry of Education, Universities, Culture and Sports, the Director General of Universities – DGU, and a representative of the Canarian Agency for Research, Innovation and Society - ACIISI), 3 representatives of the HE academic sector (2 from public universities and 1 from a private university), 2 students (1 from public universities and 1 from private universities), 1

representative of the socio-economic sector and finally the director and a secretary to the GB from the Agency.

The members of the GB are proposed by the different stakeholders for a 4-years mandate.

As a rule, the GB meets at least once a year with the opportunity to call extraordinary sessions if needed. The panel learned during the site visit that in practice, the GB meets 2 to 3 times a year.

The **Director** is appointed by the Canarian Ministry of Education and is selected based on a proven experience in teaching and research and a general professional experience of 15 years. The mandate is not a fixed and explicit term duration, the director is appointed by the President of the Autonomous Community by Decree for the duration of his/her political mandate. The director is responsible for implementing the Agency's strategy and ensuring its operation.

The **Staff members** run the operations linked to all the administrative tasks and activities related to external quality assurance processes. Staff members attend site-visits as coordinators in the ex-post accreditation of study programmes (technical QA staff).

The **Technical Committees (TC)** are in charge of evaluating external quality assurance activities. They are formed by quality assurance experts selected based on predefined criteria, trained, and assigned to a committee of the knowledge area to which they pertain. Members of the Technical Committees draft and validate evaluation reports. For the renewal of study programme accreditation, Technical Committees for each study programme under assessment who base their evaluation on the report of a panel of experts are appointed. The members of the panel are different from those of the Technical Committee. These expert panels carry out the site-visit and produce an experts' report, which is submitted to the TC for the evaluation decision.

The **Advisory Committee (AC)** is a recently established body. It was created 2 years ago, and it is composed of 5 members, all appointed by the director of ACCUEE. The AC has a merely consultative role. Its main function is to review and give feedback on thematic analysis from their experts' point of view.

ACCUEE'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

ACCUEE's activities are divided into two sections:

- a) University section (partly under the ESG)
- b) Non-university section (not under the ESG)

a) University section

ACCUEE performs a series of procedures on external quality assurance, according to its legal framework and carries out the following processes regarding the university sector:

Study-programmes' accreditation

Pursuant to the national and regional legal frameworks, the accreditation of study programmes is a compulsory process for all the officially recognised programmes at bachelor, master, and doctoral levels. It is organized into three steps:

I. Ex-ante accreditation of study programmes:

This first step consists in evaluating the initial proposal of new programmes based on a desk evaluation. It is carried out prior to the implementation of a study programme and is divided into two parts with different aims:

- An administrative evaluation under the regional Ministry's competency, delegated to ACCUEE. It aims at allowing the Government evaluating the need of a new programme in terms of labour market relevance, competencies, etc. on the Canarian territory. As demonstrated by the mapping provided in the SAR, by the interviews with stakeholders and by the non-relevance with several ESG due to its nature, this phase is not under the ESG and is not evaluated in the present report.
- An ESG-based evaluation under ANECA's competency which checks if the curriculum of the programme is in line with the legal framework for the study-programmes accreditation and its compliance with the criteria established in the protocols. This step is carried out by ANECA as far as the Spanish legal framework requires the Agencies to be registered in EQAR. If ACCUEE becomes an EQAR registered Agency, it will apply REACU's protocol.

Both steps are based on a report: the administrative one from ACCUEE and the ESG-based one from ANECA. Decisions are taken first by the Canarian Government for the administrative phase and, if approved, by the national Council of Universities for the ESG-based evaluation. The accredited study-programmes can officially open and will follow the other steps of the accreditation of study programmes.

2. Monitoring of study programmes:

After the authorization of a new study programmes is confirmed by the Council of Universities in the framework of the ex-ante accreditation step, ACCUEE runs the monitoring of study programmes. It is a desk-based evaluation aiming at following up on the implementation of an accredited study programme focusing on checking that the implementation of the programme is carried out in accordance with the initial proposal and on analysing the main results of the implementation.

It applies to all programmes at least once in three years after the implementation of the programme and after every renewal of accreditation.

3. Ex-post accreditation of study programmes:

Bachelor and Doctoral study programmes every 6 years and Master programmes every 4 years have to undergo an ex-post accreditation. This is the third and last step of the accreditation of study programmes process.

This step includes a site-visit carried out by an experts' panel who drafts a site-visit report. This report is the basis for the Technical Committees to elaborate the external review report sent to the Council of Universities who takes the decision.

For this step, the protocol used is the one of ANECA and the evaluation process is carried out by ACCUEE for the Canarian HEIs.

In the last five years, ACCUEE ran a total of 76 ex-ante accreditations (implementation in the table below), 66 monitoring accreditations and 112 ex-post accreditations as detailed in the following table:

QA PROCESSES	ACTIVITIES PER YEAR				
	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
IMPLEMENTATION	28	15	12	16	5
MONITORING	22	22	4	8	10
ACCREDITATION	31	13	15	15	38

Source: SAR, page 24

Higher Education Institutions

None of these evaluation processes are currently run by ACCUEE but are at a different stage of development:

- Teaching activity evaluation system (Docentia)

This voluntary process, not based on legal requirements, aims at supporting HEIs in the implementation of an evaluation system for evaluating the teaching activity within a university center. In the same way as for the accreditation of study programmes, it is based on a three-steps process: evaluation of the design of the system (desk-based), follow-up of the implementation of the system (desk-based) and, certification of the system implemented including a site-visit. ACCUEE will take decisions.

For this process not yet implemented by ACCUEE, an agreement with the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain – ANECA - has been signed in January 2022. This agreement states that ACCUEE can apply the Docentia protocol in the Canary Islands but will not do so until the Agency can have its own Technical Committee in charge of these evaluations. The aim is to put it in place by 2023 and, in the meantime, ANECA will continue carrying this out. The criteria applied by ACCUEE will be the ones applied by ANECA.

- Internal Quality Assurance System evaluation (Audit)

The purpose of this process is to promote the development and implementation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems at HEI's centers and put into practice a procedure leading to the recognition and certification of such systems. It is currently voluntary but it is legally required for applying to the institutional accreditation.

It is based on a three-steps process: evaluation of the design of the IQAS (desk-based), follow-up of the implementation of the IQAS (desk-based) and, certification of the system implemented including a site-visit. The Agency carrying out the evaluation takes decisions.

It is carried out by ANECA in the Canarian HEIs, and there is neither an existing agreement nor a short-term project of agreement with ANECA to implement this process at this time.

- Institutional accreditation

This process establishes an initial phase of institutional accreditation and the renewal of this accreditation within six years. If a HEI has 50% of its study programmes accredited ex-post and an implemented IQAS, it can validate the accreditation of all its study programmes without going through the ex-post accreditation of study programmes renewal.

As of today, the accreditation of study programmes is run by ACCUEE through the ex-post accreditation of study programmes, and the internal quality assurance system implementation certification is run by ANECA.

ANECA certifies the implementation of these IQAS through its Audit procedure (see above) and ACCUEE will have to develop a process for this institutional accreditation that requires being registered in EQAR. Decisions will be taken by the Council of Universities.

- **Evaluation of universities and university centers**

This future process aims at evaluating the relevance of the creation, recognition and authorization of universities and university centers in the Canary Islands. This legally based process is not yet developed by ACCUEE, and no information was provided to the panel on its development.

To conclude on institutional activities, ACCUEE plans to start implementing these activities once it achieves its registration in EQAR but it clearly stated to the panel that Docentia will be developed in the short-run while all the other processes will be developed on a middle-long term.

Teaching staff evaluation

The academic staff recruitment is based on an assessment by ACCUEE for public and private universities. It evaluates academics' teaching and research performance as a compulsory requirement for hiring by public or private universities.

On the other hand, ACCUEE runs assessments for the evaluation for the assignment of salary complements.

Both activities, as agreed in the ToRs are not under the ESG.

b) Non- university section

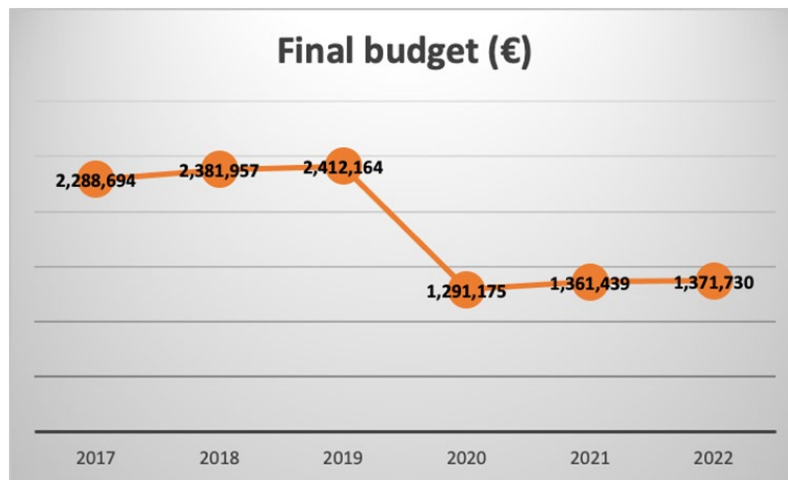
ACCUEE is the only QAA in Spain that assesses the entire education system, which includes: infant education, primary education, secondary education, further education (and higher education developed in part a. above). In the non-university section, the Agency has functions of evaluation of the educational system, of institutions and programmes and services.

These activities fall outside the scope of the ESG.

ACCUEE'S FUNDING

Article 75 of Decree 250/2017 of December 26 on Regulations Governing the Organisational Structure & Functions of the ACCUEE, states that the Ministry in charge of education in the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands is responsible for allocating sufficient funds to ensure that the Agency has the necessary budget and resources to perform its various activities.

The budget is approved on an annual basis, based on the director's proposal to the Governing Board sent to the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands for ratification and transfer of the funds to ACCUEE.



Source: document “Presupuestos of ACCUEE”

The reduction of funds in 2020 was caused by a drastic reduction of current expenditures on good and services, thus with no consequences on personnel (the number of employees remained almost stable in those years). This reduction is due to the change of functions assigned to the Agency by the Canary Islands Government. Indeed, the transfer of the management of the educational innovative projects (not under the ESGs) was moved from ACCUEE to other departments within the Regional Government, jointly to the budget assigned.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ACCUEE 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

ACCUEE's mission, vision and values are publicly available on the Agency's website and presented in the 2022-2024 Strategic Plan. The current statement on mission, which is relevant for ACCUEE's strategy, reads:

"The Agency's mission is to assure quality in both university and non-university education in the Canary Islands, thus contributing to continuous improvement which, in turn, generates value for wider society."

Out of the verbal evidence provided during the site-visit, the mission is basically mirroring the legal remit and expectations on the Agency. Based on this mission, ACCUEE has developed its two years Strategic Plan translated into an action plan, both published on the website. The Strategic Plan is based on 6 strategic goals which are divided into more specific objectives that are subsequently aligned with ACCUEE's mission and activities: 1) Structure and resources; 2) Evaluation processes; 3) Analysis and forecasting; 4) Transparency, communication and information; 5) Collaborations and internationalization; 6) Higher education stakeholders participation.

ACCUEE undertakes, on a regular and cyclical basis, a series of external quality assurance procedures which have been described in details in the section "ACCUEE's functions, activities, procedures". The Agency runs study programme accreditation (monitoring and ex-post) for bachelor and master's degrees based in the Canary Islands. All these activities are law-based and regulated by Laws, Royal Decrees, and Decrees at national and regional levels.

The agency plays a supporting role in the Canary Islands Higher Education Area (CIHEA) to achieve a better understanding of quality assurance in higher education. This is done especially through the consistent provision of information regarding the interpretation and implementation of the ESG.

In addition to providing information through the website and protocols, it also organizes training sessions on specific topics and seeks regular dialogue with higher education institutions to obtain feedback on the different processes.

The Agency also collects and processes information on the quality and efficiency of higher education activities through the analyses of data and publication of thematic analyses (detailed under ESG 3.4).

The distinction between external quality assurance in line with the ESG and other fields of work is transparently communicated on ACCUEE's website. The university activities on the one hand and non-university activities on the other hand are easily identifiable and separated. The workforce as well is divided between both sets of activities as explained in the SAR and during the interviews with the staff.

Regarding the stakeholders' involvement in the governance and work of the Agency, the official documents provided, the interviews taken with members of the governing and decision-making bodies, and experts, including students provided sufficient evidence, that the various groups are involved at different levels: Members of the Governing Board, the Technical Committees', and the experts' panels. The involvement is accomplished by participating in surveys and meetings organized. In 2022, ACCUEE sent two surveys to HEIs focusing on the overall quality of the processes in place and also to revise the procedures. At the time of the site-visit, results were not yet published.

The given legal framework ensures representatives of students, higher education institutions, professionals and ministries are present in the GB.

As far as international members of the Agency are concerned, only a few international representatives have been involved in the TCs so far. International perspective is not foreseen in the GB and as well not in the informal, recently established consultancy AB of the Agency.

The interviews with stakeholders show that they are convinced that ACCUEE's work highly contributes to quality assurance in the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands. The panel gathered evidence that experts are particularly satisfied and convinced with the level of professionalism of the Agency, and students confirmed they were considered as equal members in the Governing Board and Technical Committees. HEI's and the Ministry insisted on the usefulness of ACCUEE's accreditation procedures for improving internal quality assurance systems and information to society and the efforts done in the last few years to enhance the Agency's work and processes.

Analysis

ACCUEE's mission is clearly defined and publicly available on its website. The mission is the founding base for development of the Strategic Plan which further determines objectives to be reached for a two-year period, accompanied with an action plan ensuring operative implementation of the mission defined.

The panel was provided with sufficient evidence and therefore concludes that the different external quality assurance procedures conducted by the Agency are carried out on a regular basis. Activities are clear and understandable to the different stakeholders.

The public bodies, HEIs, experts, students and representatives of the professional world are represented in the different bodies of the Agency. However, in the different bodies of the Agency (Governing Board, Advisory Board, Technical Committees, and experts' panels), the panel sees room for improvement with regards to the representation of international representatives. The international perspective and feedback could be a strong asset to continue improving the Agency's activity.

The relevant stakeholders are involved in the development or improvement of the accreditation procedures carried out by ACCUEE, be it through meetings, surveys, or informal feedbacks.

It is worth noting that the interviews allowed the panel to confirm that ACCUEE's work is highly appreciated and trusted, and that the Agency has a key role in quality assurance developments in the Canary Islands where HEIs are particularly satisfied with the Agency's professional work.

Panel suggestion for further improvement:

I. The panel suggests including international representatives in the various governing, strategic, and operational bodies of the Agency.

Panel conclusion: 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

ACCUEE was established, in its current structure, in 2012 with the Law 4/2012 of June 25. It replaced both the Canarian Institute of Quality Assurance (ICEC) created by Law in 1990 and the Canary Islands Agency for Quality Assurance and Assessment in Higher Education (ACECAU).

As stated in the Decree 250/2017 of December 26, ACCUEE is an autonomous administrative body with its own legal entity (Article 1). The Decree details the structure and functions of the Agency as well as its main purposes: *to assure excellence and objectivity at all levels of the Canary Islands' education system and to assure the quality of the university system in the Canary Islands.*

The Regional Government recognizes the reports and accreditation results of ACCUEE for the process in place and its role as an independent body promoting and ensuring quality assurance in higher education in the Canary Islands as the panel learned during the meeting with the Ministry representatives.

The interviews reassured that ACCUEE is formally recognized by the different stakeholders (Ministry, ANECA, HEI's, experts) as the interlocutor and competent authority in charge of the procedures for external quality assurance in the Canary Islands.

Analysis

ACCUEE is legally based, its external QA activities are defined, and the results of its accreditation procedures are recognized by its stakeholders.

The Agency is perceived as the key actor on external quality assurance in the Canary Islands where it operates by national and regional bodies that compose REACU and the Ministry of Education of the Canary Islands.

All the external quality assurance activities of ACCUEE consider and refer to the Law and Decrees in its procedures for accreditation and make it public so that the principle of reciprocity between the Agency and the legislation which regulates it are covered.

Panel conclusion: 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

The Decree 250/2017 of December 26 on *Regulations for the Organizational Structure and Functions of ACCUEE* states that the Agency is an autonomous administrative body with its own legal entity (Introduction of the Law). The Agency is legally linked to the regional Ministry in charge of education (Article 1); as an independent body (Introduction of the Law and Article 1) it is carrying out its functions entrusted by law.

As a public entity, the Agency's funding is provided by the Government of the Canary Islands. The above-mentioned Decree (Article 15) indicates that the Agency is provided with sufficient allocation of funds in order to fulfil its mandates.

The interviews with the director, administrative staff, Ministry and GB confirmed that, once the budget is approved by the Government, the internal allocation and management is the responsibility of the Agency, in concrete of the director.

Regarding human resources, the permanent and temporary staff of the Agency (as described under ESG 3.5) is considered being civil servants. Therefore, the room for maneuver of the Agency and of the director for recruiting staff is quite limited. The panel learned, during the interviews, that because of the specific status of the Agency, new staff must come from the administration or from public competitive examinations, regardless of the specific profiles the Agency might need. However, if the needed profile is not available among the permanent staff of the administration, the agency can ask the Ministry for the recruitment of temporary staff.

The organisational structure of the Agency is as follows: the GB supervises the Agency; a director ensures that the activities are carried out; the staff coordinates and runs activities; the TC evaluate outcomes of external quality assurance activities.

The GB is composed of 12 members and is chaired and co-chaired by the regional Ministry. 33% of the total members of the GB are appointed by the Government. The other members are representatives of universities, students, the socio-economic field and the Agency itself (as described in section "ACCUEE" above). The members are typically nominated for the duration of the general political mandate in Spain and in the Region, namely 4 years, even though no explicit reference to duration of terms is made in articles 4, 5, 6, 7 of the Decree 250/2017 that approved the regulations of ACCUEE. Article 6 of the Decree 250/2017 states that "*The Governing Board is responsible for the functions granted to it by this Regulation, and in any case for the planning and programming of the Agency's lines of action, as well as the supervision of the activities carried out*". Its role is mainly to approve the Agency's strategy, action plans, economic and accounting documentation, and evaluation protocols. The rules for the Governing Board's membership and functioning are included in the Decree 250/2017 (Articles 5, 6, 7), there is no additional internal rule or regulation issued by the Agency or the GB itself.

The director is appointed by the President of the Autonomous Community by Decree for the duration of his/her political mandate, as mentioned previously. The director manages, coordinates, plans, and monitors the Agency's activities while endorsing technical and administrative duties (Decree 250/2017, Article 8).

External quality assurance activities are coordinated by the Agency's staff and carried out by the Technical Committees whose independence is underlined in the Article 10 of the Decree 250/2017. The Article states that its members act with full independence and approve the results of its activities.

Independence of TC is reinforced by the fact that ACCUEE also includes independence of experts in its procedure for the selection and nomination of the TC. This procedure also details that the TC and experts' panels participating in the accreditation procedures are selected and appointed in an autonomous manner, based on clearly defined criteria among professional experience, research expertise, and on knowledge (detail under ESG 2.4). Technical Committees and experts' panels act on their own and do not represent the institution they belong to.

Future experts' panels members apply through a specific section on the website. The technical staff of the Agency select experts, which are finally nominated by the director of the ACCUEE. Moreover, the composition of the experts' panels is published on the website for each of the accreditation processes carried out by the Agency. Selected and nominated experts must undergo training on the procedure and criteria of the accreditation process in which they are involved as the panel could check during the interviews.

As stated in the SAR and confirmed by experts interviewed during the site visit, they receive ACCUEE's *Code of Ethics* and must sign a statement that engages them in complying with the rules and committing with their duties.

The procedures used for external quality assurance activities are the ones defined either by REACU or ANECA, based on the national and regional legal frameworks, and adapted to the Canarian context by ACCUEE. The assessment methodologies and criteria are published on the website and are the property of the Agency. The procedures are reviewed and enhanced by ACCUEE based on the result of the meta-evaluation they carry out and the feedback from the different stakeholders. It is worth noting that all evaluation procedures must be validated by the Governing Board, chaired and co-chaired by the Ministry.

Formal outcomes are based on the Technical Committee reports that are fully elaborated and validated by its members (stated under Article 6 of the Decree 250/2017 quoted above). The final decision on ex-post accreditation is not the responsibility of ACCUEE, neither it is the responsibility of the Technical Committees nor of the regional Ministry.

The ACCUEE report goes to the national Council of Universities (*Consejo de Universidades*), which formulates its decision on whether to renew the accreditation or not, and that decision is then ratified – and published – by the national Ministry of Education (*Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte*). The reports by ACCUEE are available on their web official register of Canarian study programmes.

From the ACCUEE official register, the final decisions on ex-post accreditation can be reached by direct link (they are published on the Spanish national register of study programmes, called RUCT). Based on the information shared during the site visit the Council of Universities, the decision-making body, can revert decisions and decide on non-accreditation of a study programme or vice versa. Thus, the panel was informed that it occurred very rarely in the past.

For the ex-ante accreditation of study programme (also referred to as verification, implementation or implantation, in the evidence and interviews) that ACCUEE will carry out if it becomes a member of ENQA and a listed EQAR Agency (up to now, the report is drafted by ANECA following the VERIFICA protocol, that checks compliance with the requirements of ESG Part I), the responsibility of the final decision is – instead – on the Canarian Ministry of Education. It might happen more often that to-be study programmes that receive positive evaluation are not implemented, as far as because

the Canarian Ministry must take in consideration it is about opening new programmes based on the Region's needs, and not only the compliance with a set of quality standards.

Analysis

Organisational independence:

ACCUEE is, by definition in the Law, an autonomous and independent public body. Its supervisory body is the GB composed of 12 members of which one third is nominated by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry holds the presidency and vice-presidency of the Governing Board.

Based on the role defined by Law one of the tasks of the GB is to approve the methodologies for external quality assurance based on the findings/conclusion the Technical Committees have made and the proposals the agency makes to the GB.

The panel considers the proportion of governmental-ministerial members being too influential. This is both because of the GB's prerogative of approval of accreditation methodologies and criteria, and because the Ministry acts as final decision-maker. In the light of the narrow notion of independency, at the moment the panel considers the overlapping of role and responsibilities between the Ministry and tasks of the GB in addition with the governmental proportion in the GB as a potential risk for the independency of the Agency.

This potential risk to independency is reinforced by the fact that the sole regulation on the GB's role is the one laid down in the Decree 250/2017 and it does not clearly state the appointment and decision-taking process and the term durations, and policy and authority of dismissal of members of the GB.

As stated above the panel did not see any evidence regarding a procedural regulation or alike for the professional conduct of the work of the GB. To increase and safeguard independence, the panel strongly recommends the GB/the Agency to issue its own organisational rules and regulations for the GB, based on the legal framework.

The director is directly selected and nominated by the regional Government based on two criteria: a proven experience in teaching and research and a general professional experience of 15 years.

Based on the information provided, there is neither a public call nor a clear selection process defined for this position at ACCUEE. As stated, the director is appointed by the Government. According to the role and functions explained in the SAR and underlined during the interviews, the director is member of the GB. At the same time, he/she is responsible – in a nutshell for the Agency's professional conduct and independent operations. In addition, he/she chairs all the TC for the ex-post accreditation of study programmes, that – even though it is not the final decision-making body for accreditation renewal – approves the report that informs the final decision-making bodies (Council of Universities).

For defusing these potential risks to independence, the panel suggests that ACCUEE should proactively exchange with the regional Government on the possibility to amend the director's appointment procedure and to clarify its role and functions in the different bodies of the Agency in order to safeguard organisational as well as operational independence.

Operational independence:

External quality assurance procedures applied at ACCUEE are defined within the REACU network based on the national legal framework. ACCUEE is responsible to adapt these procedures to the regional context. The Agency drafts and proposes a methodology and criteria to the GB who has the role of approving it.

The panel could confirm that the Technical Committees run the evaluations and have a full decision-making role. The drafted reports are published without any intervention from stakeholders, except for the ex-post accreditation of study programmes procedure. Indeed, as mentioned previously, this procedure has TCs chaired by the director of the Agency. The reports are submitted to the Ministry for taking a decision and to the universities evaluated. As expected by the ESG, reports are publicly available at the website of the Agency.

Panels are composed by experts selected from a databases. The experts, pre-selected by ACCUEE's staff, have applied filling a form on the website. They also can be selected because they are recognized experts in other Agencies, particularly in Spain. Panels include a majority of members from outside the Canary Islands, allowing for a smaller risk of conflict of interest. They are all trained, and they all sign the *Code of Ethics*. For all this, the panel is convinced that ACCUEE's panels are adequately selected and trained to run evaluation processes independently and without any influence.

Finally, in terms of financial resources, the panel had no indication of any intervention in the management of the budget allocated by the Government. ACCUEE has sufficient funds to carry out its activities and is free to manage its financial resources.

Independence of formal outcomes:

The panel believes that formal outcomes such as the final report with a decision proposal are the responsibility of the Agency. It was shown that reports are drafted and validated by the Technical Committees and sent to the Ministry for taking the final decision. Experts from the Technical Committees were clear on the fact that nobody interferes in the reports they produce. The staff of the Agency provides support from a technical perspective only.

Panel recommendations:

1. The panel recommends ACCUEE to have an active role in initiating a review of the legal frameworks' definition on the composition and the proportion of governmental members in the GB and specifically the role of chair and vice-chair of the Governing Board should be reconsidered to allow a higher level of independency from the Ministry.
2. The panel recommends ACCUEE's Governing Board to issue its organisational rules for its work, appointment, and dismissal of its members, based on the legal framework.
3. The panel recommends ACCUEE to initiate a reflection with the regional Government on the current process in place regarding the appointment procedure of the director and its role and involvement in different bodies of the Agency.

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

The Agency carries out a series of accreditation activities and analyses its results in a so-called meta-evaluation process on 1) ex-ante accreditation, 2) monitoring and 3) ex-post accreditation of study programmes conducted on the CIHES. The annual meta-evaluation is based on the data collected during the various accreditation processes and stakeholders' surveys, that contains improvement proposals and action plans.

As described in the SAR, the Agency also publishes reports on specific topics, such as the analysis of the funding of public universities. This report aimed at examining and reporting on the funding of the two public universities of the Canary Islands. This analysis project has been carried out by ACCUEE for the *Directorate General of Universities*, which as stated above is a ministerial entity. The Ministry recognized and underlined, during the site visit, the high quality of the report, its robustness and coherence with the context. It was underlined that the report provided input on key items for their strategy and Government policy regarding funding of public universities.

As outlined in the SAR and confirmed during the interviews, the Agency supports thematic analyses with a specific budget allocated to appoint external experts with an expertise on the subject to be analysed.

The panel also learned that ACCUEE participates in the work of the *Informe sobre el estado de la evaluación externa de la calidad en las universidades españolas – ICU* (Report on the state of the art of external quality assurance in the Spanish universities) on a yearly basis. This public report is coordinated by ANECA, based on a legal requirement, in collaboration with the 10 regional Agencies.

The panel was provided with the evidence that the conduction of thematic analysis is an integral part of the job profiles of the staff denominated as “forecasting” staff. They are 2 in number and have other activities related to internal quality assurance in the Agency.

Analysis

The panel was supported with sound evidence on ACCUEE's practice in place regarding regular publishing of reports analysing the general findings of their external quality assurance activities in addition to specific research activities conducted. It appeared to the panel to be useful for the Agency and its stakeholders. The Agency publishes thematic analysis on a regular basis on its website and makes it available to the society at large.

Reports are clear and use reliable data as a basis for the analysis. Reports and thematic analysis contribute to the improvement of quality assurance, while identifying areas for improvement linked to all aspects of the Agency's work: methodologies, criteria, practical details, etc.

The thematic analysis carried out always come from an identified need and based on a series of data produced and available.

ACCUEE has aligned staff resources with partly dedicated positions for thematic analysis. It allows the Agency to have a systematic approach and a standardized procedure for the data collection and reports produced.

For its solid methodology and organization, the panel commends the ACCUE for the useful analyses carried out and for using the data collected in the different sources available.

Panel commendation:

I. The panel commends ACCUEE for its solid thematic analysis methodology based on data collection.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

Evidence

ACCUEE's financial resources come from public funding and more concretely from the Canary Islands Government. The funds are allocated based on the proposal made by the director to the GB. Once approved, the proposal is sent to the Government for final ratification. If any increase in the budget is observed, it must be submitted to the regional Government Council as indicated during the interviews.

The Agency had an amount of €1.371.730 in 2021 for carrying out its external quality assurance activities, with a similar amount every year (e.g budget of 2020: €1.291.175). The amount was greater until 2019, as reported in the "ACCUEE's funding section" above but is stable in the last 3 years. The director and staff of the Agency confirmed during the site-visit that the budget covers all staff and infrastructure costs. It was in addition explained that it is in the scope of responsibility of the director to allocate the budget to the different items defined.

The panel learned during the site-visit that the Agency has a quite clear understanding of the allocation of funds to activities on an annual basis. This especially applies for the three steps of the study programmes accreditation which are established and follow the schedule included in the protocols. It was explained to the panel, that years with peaks of workload ACCUEE can ensure to have sufficient financial and human resources by requesting additional funds in advance to the Government and as well re-organise its workload and tasks defined among staff.

Currently, there are 24 people working at ACCUEE, 16 of them in the university section. They include a director, a secretariat, managers, and technical staff in charge of quality assurance and administrative staff managed by a head of department. A vast majority of the staff members are civil servants permanently working for the Agency. 4 staff members are on secondments (temporarily appointed by the Government) of which 2 are in the university section.

During the different interviews with the staff members, the panel was provided with evidence that ACCUEE's staff finds that the workload is adequate and adapted to the activities of the Agency. As previously mentioned, the human resources can be redistributed depending on the workload and activities that need a bigger involvement during a period of time.

In order to guarantee adequate knowledge and competencies of its staff members, the Agency carries out different types of training:

- **Access to the training plan of the Autonomous Community:** training courses are offered by the Canarian Institute for the Public Administration (*Instituto Canario de la Administracion Publica*). It can be on legal requirements, tools of the Ministry, etc.
- **ACCUEE's internal training;** the Agency identifies specific needs for a job position who must follow a training. It can take the form of an online training on a tool or a training on accreditation procedures (e.g.: participation of ACCUEE's technical staff to site-visits organized by ANECA in the framework of the ex-post accreditation of study programmes).

- **International trainings:** ACCUEE proposes international seminars and workshops to its staff (6 events in 2022 and 5 in 2021).

Last but not least, the panel was provided with sound evidence that most of the workflows and communication flows, both within the Agency and between the Agency, the external stakeholders, and the experts, are supported by fit-for-purpose IT resources, including – but not limited to – a Moodle platform (detailed under ESG 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5), a tool for keeping track of internal QA tasks and deadlines, databases of experts (detailed under ESG 2.4 and 3.3), and a transparent and information-rich website.

Analysis

As regards the actual performance of ACCUEE in running its external quality assurance processes, there is evidence, corroborated in interviews – and in view of the number of staff and the budget in general – that, in principle, there are no financial or staff shortages which might prevent ACCUEE from performing the tasks assigned to the Agency. Financial and human resources are thus sufficient to carry out ACCUEE's assessment tasks and extra tasks as can be the international seminars for the staff or contracting external experts for a specific meta-evaluation.

Regarding human resources, while quantity and quality are sufficient, the panel nonetheless observed that the recruitment is allowed only through civil servant positions and under the Canarian Government competency. The panel suggests, if the legal frameworks can be adapted, to leave it under ACCUEE's responsibility, first in terms of recruitment and second in terms of profiles definition. Indeed, this would allow the Agency to recruit profiles that correspond to the specific Agency's needs and when needed.

During the last few years, there have been activities to enhance professional development. Staff is regularly trained, also by attending ENQA or INQAAHE events. This indicates that part of the resources is dedicated to staff development.

Finally, the strong reliance of ACCUEE on IT tools and platforms for organizing both internal and external workflows is an asset for optimizing the staff activities and the Agency outputs and results. All IT tools and resources are hosted on ministerial servers subject to governmental standard cybersecurity checks and protocols, thus minimizing the risk of work paralysis / data loss due to external attacks.

Panel suggestions for further improvement:

2. The panel suggests giving ACCUEE the direct authority on the recruitment of its staff, through public services or not.
3. The panel suggests that, in the current recruitment process, job profiles are defined by the Agency based on the identified needs.

Panel conclusion: compliant

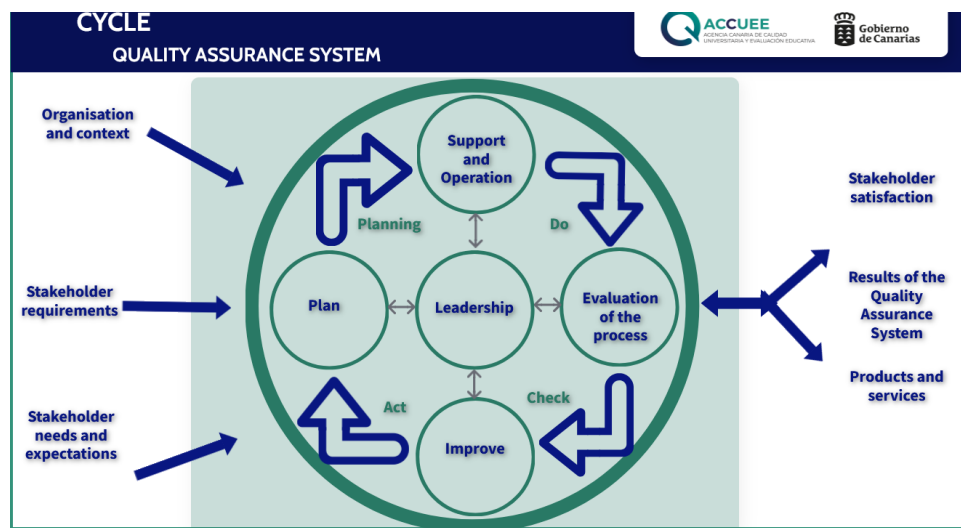
ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

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

Since the very beginning of the Agency – its predecessor - in 2007, it is certified ISO 9001 and runs annual audits as well as the re-certification processes every four years. According to this, the internal quality assurance system is based on the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle (Deming cycle) adapted by ACCUEE as follows:



Source: ACCUEE's website - <http://www.gobiernodecanarias.org/accuee/universitaria/calidad/index.html>

Each strategic process, key processes and support processes are translated into a detailed process map leading to annual reporting. ACCUEE also produced the following documents in the framework of its IQA:

- The quality policy states the Agency's commitment with quality and continuous improvement, linked to its mission, vision and values;
- The quality manual explains and details the Agency's internal quality assurance system, the tools available and the ISO norm;
- The Code of ethics lists the principles and requirements that guide the conduct of both the Agency's staff and stakeholders who carry out activities for or in the name of the ACCUEE. The panel confirms that staff and members of the Technical Committees are familiar with the Code of Ethics.

All these documents are publicly available on the Agency's website.

Moreover, to avoid any conflict of interest between the Technical Committees (and expert panels for the ex-post accreditation of study programmes) and the HEI to be evaluated, the proposal of panel composition is sent to the HEI in order to give it the opportunity to comment on any possible conflict of interest. HEIs did confirm this practice during the interviews.

Several feedback systems have been adopted by ACCUEE to collect information oriented to the improvement of its activities in general but with a particular emphasis on the external quality assurance processes.

The Agency created a public tool called "ACCUEE Listens" in which all the survey results are analysed and published on a yearly basis. Thereby, the Agency can consult results of the surveys completed by HEIs, Technical Committees (and expert panels for the ex-post accreditation of study programmes) and staff of the Agency.

All these analyses are used as data to feed into the previous mentioned meta-evaluation reports detailed under ESG 3.4 and lead to the improvement of processes. In addition, the panel was provided with information that ACCUEE is always open for direct feedback that HEIs and experts often use by contacting the technical staff.

As indicated in the SAR and checked on the website, ACCUEE has created the tool “Transparency” to support and encourage public engagement. It contains the Agency’s key documents for a better understanding and visibility of its activities. It includes the structure, role and legal framework, annual activity reports, agreements, and annual transparency reports, between others.

During the interviews, the panel could confirm that all stakeholders are convinced by ACCUEE’s professional work.

Analysis

The Agency has a solid internal quality assurance system, based on formal mechanisms leading to the improvement of its activities and of the external quality assurance processes.

The improvement of activities is based on the different feedback mechanisms in place: surveys to HEIs, experts and staff as well as thematic meetings organized by the Agency (see details under ESG 3.1) in parallel to informal ways to collect data useful to enhance the quality of ACCUEE’s activities. The results are officially published and an action plan is drawn up and included in the meta-evaluation reports.

The panel has observed a high level of satisfaction with the HEIs and experts involved in accreditation procedures based on the professional conduct and quality of the staff support.

To conclude, the fact that ACCUEE is certified by ISO since 2007 is a proof of the Agency’s commitment with quality.

Panel commendation:

2. The panel commends the Agency for its formal and regular IQA process, based on a recognized international norm.

Panel conclusion: 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

As of the SAR and as well publicly available documents, the Decree 250/2017 of December 26 regulates the governing, the organisational structure and functions of ACCUEE. Article 13 of this regulation underlines that the Agency should be externally reviewed against the ESG. The Agency is therefore legally obliged to undergo external reviews run by ENQA and EQAR as it is, as stated before, a prerequisite for conducting certain EQA activities in addition to the ones conducted up to now.

As described in ACCUEE's Strategic Plan, the ENQA external review and international recognition (Objective 5.1) is one of the key goals of the Agency.

Analysis

ACCUEE is required, by law, to undertake external review with the aim of becoming a full member of ENQA and being registered in EQAR. This is relevant, in order to carry out the full range of external quality assurance activities as foreseen in the given national and regional context.

The panel is convinced that ACCUEE is committed to comply with the ESG and use it as a tool for continuous improvement. Cyclical external reviews of the Agency will underline their commitment towards further enhancement of procedures in place and as well regarding critical reflection on defined legal frameworks.

Panel conclusion: 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

As outlined in the section "Introduction" of this report, ACCUEE currently fully runs two activities within the three-steps study programme accreditation: **monitoring** and **ex-post accreditation**.

For the ex-ante accreditation of programmes, ACCUEE will apply the protocol developed by REACU once the Agency is member of ENQA and registered on EQAR, as stated by ACCUEE during the interviews

Currently, ACCUEE only runs the administrative evaluation: a legal compulsory role delegated to ACCUEE by the Ministry, not considered as part of the processes under the ESG. It is demonstrated by the mapping provided in the SAR as well as the non-compliance with other ESG as can be the profiles of experts in panels and following the different interviews with the director and staff of ACCUEE, the Ministry and ANECA.

The future process for ex-ante accreditation of study programmes will follow the new REACU protocol adapted in line with Royal Decree 822/2021 of September 28 published on 13th of January 2022. This protocol is taken as reference for the ex-ante phase described in the table below.

The monitoring and ex-post steps of the accreditation of study programmes are well established and carried out by ACCUEE, based on its own protocol for monitoring (in place since 17th December 2021) and on ANECA's protocol for ex-post accreditation.

The SAR included a mapping of the Agency's protocols with the ESG. The mapping demonstrates that the ESG Part I is addressed by ACCUEE for study programmes accreditation.

The panel has further elaborated the mapping provided in the SAR while reflecting additional evidence requested, such as protocols, during the run of the external review. Based on all evidence provided and considered the following applies:

	(Administrative part of the ex-ante accreditation of study programmes)	Ex-ante accreditation of study programmes	Monitoring of study programmes	Ex-post accreditation of study programmes
ESG Part I				
I.1 Policy for quality assurance	I	8	3	3
I.2 Design and approval of programmes	I, 5, 6, 9	I, 2	I, 6	2
I.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment	I, 4	4	I	I
I.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	I	3	I	I
I.5 Teaching staff	3	5	4	6
I.6 Learning resources and student support	3	6, 7	5	5
I.7 Information management	None	8	2	3, 7
I.8 Public information	None	8	2	8
I.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	I, 8, 9	8	6	3
I.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	Legally based	10 Legally based	Legally based	Legally based

The SAR did not include any mapping for the *Docentia* programme. The panel was not provided with the mapping of *Docentia*.

As stated earlier in the report, the Agency has signed an agreement with ANECA in January 2022. The agreement states that ACCUEE can apply the *Docentia* protocol in the Canary Islands but only once the Agency has installed its own Technical Committee in charge of these specific evaluations. Based on the information provided during the site-visit the Agency aims to implement the *Docentia* protocol by 2023. In the meantime, ANECA will continue carrying procedures in line with the protocol. Concerning its compliance with ESG part I the panel refers to the fact, that the agreement signed clearly indicates that *Docentia* protocol takes the ESG into account. Since it is ANECA's

protocol and ANECA was assessed being compliant with the ESG the panel considers this as sufficient evidence, regardless of the fact, that the Agency itself did not provide evidence needed in the SAR.

ACCUEE's accreditation protocols provide a comprehensive approach for assessing internal quality assurance processes of HEIs.

All the standards included in the procedures are first legally established and developed by REACU, ANECA and/or ACCUEE.

These documents provide sufficient information to the HEIs evaluated and experts, on the interpretation of criteria and alignment with the ESG. All protocols for study programme accreditations include in the explanations to which ESG each criterion refers and are made available to the public on the Agency's website. These protocols are known and used by HEIs and experts' panels as the interviews taken profoundly confirmed.

Analysis

The panel confirms that ACCUEE aims at supporting HEIs to meet internal quality assurance criteria through the accreditation protocols themselves and promotes the ESG. This is also demonstrated through the regular formal and informal meetings (detailed under ESG 2.2) which are a clear and efficient way to ensure that HEIs have the correct tools to develop their internal quality assurance system.

Stakeholders and particularly HEIs recognized the important role of the Agency, first in promoting the ESG in general and then in participating to the improvement of the internal quality assurance processes within their institutions.

Based on the most recent Law on external quality assurance in Spain (Royal Decree 822/2021) the monitoring protocol has been reviewed by ACCUEE and approved in December 2021. In the light of the survey results to HEIs on the monitoring process in 2021 (34,6% were not very satisfied with the design of the process, 33,3% with its effectiveness and 37% with the length to carry out the process), the procedure is expected to improve. The Agency stated during the interviews that this update of monitoring protocol has been approved provisionally to comply with the new standards included within the new national Law, and they expect to design a new protocol within REACU during 2022. The panel therefore encourages the implementation of this new protocol but suggests ACCUEE to carefully evaluate its efficiency.

As indicated, only the processes for which the information on ESG Part I is available as of today can be assessed. It is not fully the case for the ex-ante accreditation of study programmes as far as the Agency is not carrying out this activity yet. Thus, the panel recommends the Agency to take ESG Part I into account, as stated by ACCUEE, following REACU's protocol for ex-ante accreditation in the future.

Panel recommendations

4. The panel recommends ACCUEE to take ESG part I into account following REACU's protocol as stated by the Agency for the future activities.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

4. The panel suggests ACCUEE to evaluate the efficiency of the pilot process for further improvement in the upcoming future, as far as the monitoring protocol is being piloted and in light of the last survey results based on the HEIs answers.

Panel conclusion: 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

The external quality assurance processes run by ACCUEE are designed and defined on the basis of the different Laws relevant to the previously mentioned three-steps study programme accreditation procedure. Thus, they are embedded within the legal framework that includes the general steps of the procedures and the minimum threshold criteria. The general procedures are developed by REACU, approved by CURSA and adapted by the national and/or regional QAAs.

In the case of ex-ante study programme accreditation, ACCUEE will need to develop its own protocol based on REACU's.

For the monitoring phase, the Agency has developed a protocol which is based on REACU's but, adapted for the Canary Islands implementation needs. There is evidence both in the protocol and in recent monitoring reports available on ACCUEE's online register of study programmes that – as far as study programmes accreditation is concerned – the protocol allows HEIs to demonstrate the improvement of quality of their programmes, as suggested by ESG 2.2.

For the ex-post accreditation, the Agency applies ANECA's protocol. Regarding the aforementioned future processes, the Agency puts the priority on *Docentia protocol*, but not on the implementation of institutional accreditation and therefore not on the Audit procedure and protocols.

As stated before, the Agency is a member of REACU and participates actively in its activities, including the revision and continuous improvement of protocols in place. After each modification or implementation of new legal frameworks, REACU adapts its protocols based on the given legal requirements. Consequently, REACU developed a revised protocol for the ex-ante accreditation of study programmes based on the new Royal Decree 822/2021 of September 28 published on 13th of January 2022.

The panel learned during the site-visits that in line with legal amendments, ACCUEE continuously improves its accreditation documents and protocols in place. The “ACCUEE Listens” tool in place (see detail under ESG 3.1) helps ACCUEE to improve guidelines and protocols based on stakeholders' feedback. In addition, based on results of several data collections and feedback mechanisms, mainly based on meetings with stakeholders focused on exchanging on practices areas for further improvements are detected. The results from surveys, based on HEIs and experts' panel feedback, are published on the website. The panel learned how ACCUEE has established different mechanisms detailed as follows by groups of stakeholders:

- HEIs: Since 2020, HEIs are provided with an annual survey. The survey aggregated results are publicly available. In addition, formal and informal meetings take place with the HEIs' staff in charge of quality as confirmed during the interviews with them, the heads of HEIs and the staff of the Agency.

- Experts (all profiles, including students and professionals): They also receive the annual survey on each of the procedures they are involved in since 2020. The informal discussions with the staff of the Agency are considered, by the experts themselves, as an efficient way to provide their feedback.
- Governing Board: Approves all ACCUEE's protocols during the meetings that take place, as stated before, 2-3 times a year. The GB also provides the Agency with feedback on the protocols regarding enhancement prior to its approval.
- Canary Islands Government: Regular meetings within the Governing Board they are chairing and co-chairing, to discuss, when submitted by ACCUEE, quality assurance related topics as confirmed by its members during the interview.
- REACU: Regular meetings with the other ten Spanish QAAs to exchange and work on the new laws and protocols. As stated in the SAR, in 2020 ACCUEE was appointed to serve as the coordinating Agency of the network for the entire year, consequently reaffirming its active involvement in the national sphere with regards external quality assurance legal framework and the will to be aligned with the consensual protocols within the network.

As stated in the SAR and checked by the panel through the information on the Agency's website and as well during the interviews with HEIs, all EQA activities contain a panel report with recommendations and suggestions for improvement as detailed under ESG 2.3.

The interviews confirmed that the processes run by ACCUEE have induced, for the CIHEA and more concretely for the HEIs, major improvement within the institutions and awareness on the importance of internal quality assurance. HEIs expressed their satisfaction with the processes in place. Nonetheless, they underlined the high level of workload in general and particularly related to the ex-ante accreditation phase and expressed their wish to apply, in the future, for institutional accreditation.

The ex-ante phase is, by Law, divided into two: a first administrative and legal report, not based on the ESG, ACCUEE carries out to help the Government evaluating the need of a new programme in terms of labour market relevance, competencies, etc. on the Canarian territory. The second phase is related to the actual ex-ante accreditation of study programmes based on the ESG, which - as previously stated - is not yet implemented by ACCUEE, but it will be once the Agency is registered in EQAR.

Both phases are legally established, and the two reports and results do not have the same objective. Nevertheless, the HEIs interviewed underlined a certain overlapping of information and data requested in both procedures. This partial overlapping is demonstrated by the mapping of processes with the ESG Part I in the SAR between the administrative report (called ACCUEE verification) and the accreditation, report (called ANECA verification).

Analysis

All protocols and minimum threshold criteria are defined by Law and Decrees. All final accreditation decisions are taken by the Canarian or national Ministry of Education.

ACCUEE has the sole responsibility to implement the processes that they develop or that have been developed by REACU and ANECA and implemented by the Agency. The panel is convinced that the protocols in place reflect the legal framework requirements and clearly define the roles and methodologies for study-programmes accreditation.

The Agency develops (monitoring of study programmes) or will develop (ex-ante and ex-post accreditation of study programmes) its own protocols on the legally based criteria but as confirmed during the interviews, it is considered that there is a kind of overlapping in the ex-ante accreditation of study programmes' phase. Indeed, two reports are due from the HEIs, with 2 different aims but similarities in content:

- One report under the Ministry's competency delegated to ACCUEE for the evaluation of the opportunity of a university to fulfil the programme proposed in the Canary Islands.
- One report under ANECA's competency which checks if the curriculum of the programme is in line with the legal framework for the study-programmes accreditation and its compliance with the criteria established in the protocols.

To reduce the reported high workload for HEIs the panel recommends ACCUEE, for the future to carefully analyse and support reducing the overlap between the two reports due for the ex-ante process that, today, proceed on parallel and independent courses, and yet cover partly similar content.

To go one step further concerning the workload, it appeared clearly to the panel, based on the legal framework and comments from the HEIs, that the institutional accreditation would lead to a clear improvement. It also appeared that the maturity of the Canarian HEIs in terms of external quality assurance processes could allow to implement this process and give universities the opportunities to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance. Thus, ACCUEE should start reflecting on the development of the institutional accreditation that, above all, is a legal requirement.

Regarding stakeholders' involvement, ACCUEE has made efforts for improvement, particularly in the last two years by putting in place its tool "ACCUEE Listens". The panel is convinced that this tool gives essential information on the satisfaction and effectiveness of the procedures carried out, leading to valuable and useful meta-evaluations run by the Agency.

To conclude, the panel underlines that ACCUEEs methodologies help HEIs to improve their internal processes and that the protocols applied by the Agency support HEIs to improve quality.

Panel recommendations

5. The panel recommends ACCUEE to carefully analyse the overlapping between the different procedures and particularly linked to the two-steps ex-ante accreditation process leading to two different reports.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

5. The panel suggests ACCUEE to adapt the ex-post accreditation and future ex-ante accreditation protocol as well as the Docentia procedures to the specificities of the CIHES.

6. Based on the legal requirement and on the identification of a high level of workload for HEIs, the panel suggests ACCUEE to develop the institutional accreditation process in a near future.

Panel conclusion: 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

Each EQA procedure run by ACCUEE implements elaborated and published protocols which are clearly described in terms of the legal framework, criteria with their link to the ESG, committees' composition and the different phases of the process (self-evaluation, site-visit when applicable, external review report and decision-making process). All this supports the detailed legal framework that describes the process for EQA in Spain and in the Autonomous Communities.

The accreditation model applicable to the already mentioned, three-steps accreditation of study programmes is the following:

SAR: applicable to the three-steps. HEIs analyse their compliance against the standards established in each protocol

Site-visit: takes place during the ex-post accreditation phase. It is carried out by a selected and trained panel of experts

External evaluation report: applicable to the three-steps. It is based on a template and carried by the Technical Committees. It contains areas of improvement.

Decision: taken by the regional Ministry (Council of Universities) for ex-ante accreditation (published in the regional register) and by the national Ministry for ex-post accreditation (published in the national register)

Follow-up (monitoring): it is the second step of the full evaluation procedure of study-programmes. It checks that the programme is implemented properly and is aligned with the initial proposal

All protocols applied by ACCUEE include a SAR provided by the HEI to be evaluated. The Agency provides them with the template for drafting the report as well as the numbers and data to be provided.

The site-visit takes place only during the ex-post accreditation of study programmes phase and lasts a half or full day. Indeed, the ex-ante accreditation of study programmes is a desk-based evaluation of a programme proposal i.e. a programme not yet existing. In the ex-post accreditation of the programme, a panel of experts visits the university center where the programme is implemented and offered and conducts interviews with different stakeholders: students, professors, alumni, employers, dean, and any other relevant stakeholder depending on the needs identified by the panel and needs of the various study programme. The relevant information for the conduct of the procedure for the HEIs, the experts' panels, the conduct of site-visit, the report requirements etc. and all other information to be considered in the various phases of the accreditation procedure are elaborated in detail in the "External Evaluation Guide" developed by ANECA and available on ACCUEE's website.

For the monitoring step of accreditation of study programmes, after receiving the SAR, the Technical Committee of the Agency pertinent for that knowledge area, drafts the *External Review Report (ERR)*, based on a template provided in the protocols. It is legally established as well and applies to all programmes at least once in three years after the implementation of the programme after a successful ex-ante accreditation and after every renewal of accreditation in line with the established ex-post accreditation of study programmes.

For the ex-post step of study programmes accreditation, the experts' panels draft a report and submit it to the Technical Committee appointed for each study programme or group of programmes evaluated. In any case, as stated the TC are responsible for the final ERR. As stated during the interviews ACCUEE's staff supports the TC solely regarding technical questions if needed.

Regarding decision-making the role and documents, that support decisions taken by the Canarian or the national Ministries, are described in the protocols made available to HEIs, experts and society at large on ACCUEE's website.

To ensure the consistency and professional conduct, ACCUEE has several mechanisms in place:

- Experts are trained and carefully selected (details under ESG 2.4).
- HEIs are accompanied before and during the accreditation procedures by ACCUEE's staff.
- Protocols include a full range of common information to HEIs and experts and are publicly available.
- During the site-visit for the ex-post accreditation of study programmes, expert panels are supported onsite by a technical staff from ACCUEE. He/she is not a member of the panel but provides advisory and technical support to the experts along the whole process.
- The Moodle platform (the panel had a demonstration by ACCUEE during the visit), is a tool that facilitates a common practice among experts' panels and Technical Committees and ensures they have a similar approach.

HEIs and experts mentioned that they have a clear understanding of the model and are comfortable working with it, with a limit concerning the overlapping for the ex-ante accreditation phase detailed under ESG 2.2.

Analysis

The panel was provided with sound evidence demonstrating that ACCUEE complies with the relevant procedural flow as envisaged by the ESG 2.3: a self-evaluation report, an external assessment and a site visit, an external evaluation report and follow-up (monitoring) are part of the Agency's protocols, published on the website and applied by all the stakeholders involved in the processes for the EQA activities in place.

The monitoring process in place allows ACCUEE to ensure study programmes are implemented in a satisfactory way. At the same time, it is a useful tool for HEIs to check if the study programme is still responding to the legal and EQA criteria and with the same level of quality. It also allows HEIs to pursue the work on recommendations. Monitoring is a compulsory periodical process, and the Agency has its own protocol.

All the ERR respond to the defined criteria of the corresponding protocol and are efficient for:

- transmitting argued decision's proposals to the Council of Universities
- giving helpful information to HEIs on strengths and areas of improvement
- providing information to the society on the quality of a study programme.

The panel encourages ACCUEE to apply the same rigor in complying with this ESG for the EQA processes to come: ex-ante accreditation and Docentia at a short term and institutional accreditation at a medium term, based on the Agency's strategic priorities.

In conclusion and based on the evidence, the panel confirms that the current EQA activities are based on clear methodologies, easily accessible on the Agency's website and on the Moodle platform and that stakeholders, and particularly HEIs, find it useful and fit for purpose.

Panel conclusion: 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

As an introduction to this ESG, the panel would like to clarify the terminology used since it was not clear based on the information provided in the SAR. Therefore, the panel requested clarifications from ACCUEE prior to the site visit and in addition ensured the correctness of the information provided during the site-visits:

- Experts' panels: composed of experts who carry out the site-visit in the framework of the ex-post accreditation of study programmes. The experts' panels elaborate an experts' report for the further tasks of the Technical Committees.
- Technical Committees: composed of experts who produce the final report for ex-ante, monitoring and ex-post accreditation and formulate the proposal of decision sent to the Council of Universities and to the HEIs for ex-post accreditation.

According to the Decree 250/2017 of December 26, all experts are appointed by the director of ACCUEE.

The criteria for the selection of experts are defined and detailed in ACCUEE's *Procedure for the selection of experts*, published on the website.

Experts' panels in charge of the site-visit for the ex-post accreditation procedure are appointed for each site-visit and composed of 3 members: 2 academics and 1 student. There are neither professional nor international representatives appointed. In 2022, 58 experts' panels were formed to carry out the site-visits.

The Technical Committees are composed of academics, students, and professional members. International members are not mentioned in the SAR but are included in the public procedure on the selection of experts. *A priori*, the Technical Committees for ex-ante accreditation will follow the same rule as for monitoring and ex-post accreditation as indicated in the existing procedure.

For the monitoring of study programmes, the Technical Committees are 5, corresponding to the 5 knowledge areas. The number of members vary between 5 and 15. The panel identified that 4 out of 5 Committees have no international experts involved.

In 2021, 17 Technical Committees were appointed for ex-post accreditation procedures. The task of each TC was to assess one or several study programmes depending on their background and

specialities. 10 out of 17 Committees had no international representative involved. In the 7 remaining cases the same international representative, namely a student member, was appointed.

The composition of all the Technical Committees and experts' panels is published in full on ACCUEE's website. As detailed in the selection procedure, the TC and experts' panels are formed based on the profiles defined by the Agency and on parity: the panel could check that, in 2021-22, 56,7% are female in the Technical Committees for the monitoring step, 27% in the Technical Committee for ex-post accreditation and 30, 8% are female in the experts' panels for the ex-post accreditation of study programmes. Based on the information provided in the SAR and information published on the website, experts come from other Autonomous Communities or countries, except in the case of the professional members.

There is a set of common criteria for all the experts' profiles, in addition to specific ones depending on the profiles. They are summarized as follows:

Common criteria:

Expert members of the Technical Committees and members of experts' panels for site-visits should be from the knowledge area of the study programme they will evaluate. A previous experience in external evaluation is highly valued as well. They should have knowledge of quality assurance and/or have ACCUEE's training, compulsory for all committees and panels' members. In addition, they must sign the Code of Ethics and must not have conflicts of interest.

Specific criteria per profiles:

Academic experts should have at least 10 years teaching experience and a certified research activity with no direct link to the CIHES but coming from other Autonomous Communities. They must have knowledge and experience in the assessment of study programmes, must have participated in Docentia processes or must be experienced in the design, management and implementation of study programmes.

Student experts must be current students of an accredited higher education study programme. Experience as a student representative or being active in any improvement activity of a university is a plus.

Professional experts must have a professional experience of at least 4 years and an expertise related to the knowledge area of the study programmes to be assessed. They should know the Canarian Higher Education context and external quality assurance processes in place.

The requirements for each category of experts are predefined in the accreditation protocols available on the Agency's website.

Based on the interviews with experts, ACCUEE's administrative staff and the documents provided: all experts who participate in the Agency's external evaluations sign the Code of Ethics including a non-conflict of interest statement. Experts are paid for their assessment activities, based on a remuneration defined in the resolution n° 549/2021, modified in March 2022 by the Agency's Director. This fee is similar to the one of other Spanish Agencies.

For selection, ACCUEE has two ways to select experts:

- I. As mentioned in the SAR: through the permanent databases adapted to the different profiles (academics, students, professionals). Experts have to fulfil an online application that is reviewed by the technical staff of the Agency

2. As checked during the interviews with experts: through the databases of other Spanish Agencies (one of the interviewed experts had been contacted as an ANECA experienced reviewer)

Experts selected to be members of a Technical Committee or experts' panel, independently of the way they applied and of their previous experience in QA, must have a training. It consists in a preparation on a specific procedure and the link of the procedure to the ESG's compliance. In parallel, ACCUEE has designed an online course, available on its Moodle platform (the panel had a demonstration during the site-visit), and regularly organized on QA in higher education addressed to experts at the beginning and extended to other stakeholders in the last two editions.

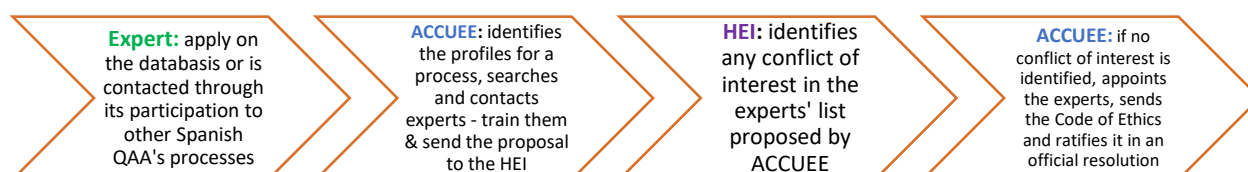
All these elements, described in the SAR, have been confirmed by the interviews and additional evidence was requested by the panel (e.g.: access to the Moodle).

It is also worth noting that the support provided by the Agency's staff all along the process of an accreditation procedure, in particular their availability and problem-solving capability, received praise from the experts whom the panel met. They also emphasized that they feel equal in assessment, independently of their profile.

Analysis

The composition of the panel and the selection of experts are clear, published and, as a rule, appropriate.

For selection, ACCUEE applies a process that meets the ESG expectations in terms of appropriateness of profiles for a particular process, of independence and of no conflict of interest. The main steps of the process are summarized as follows:



As regards the composition of panels, academics and students are represented in all the Technical Committees and experts' panels nominated by ACCUEE. Professionals are represented in the Technical Committees but not in experts' panel who run the site-visits of the ex-post accreditation of study programmes. However, the panel considers, that their participation in the site-visit would be an asset for the accreditation of study programmes. It would emphasise the evaluation of competences and learning outcomes relevant for the professional field, and for labour market needs.

International experts are, as stated before, not represented in the Technical Committees (with very few exceptions) and experts' panels. ACCUEE might reflect on the added value, for the Agency and the CIHEA in general, to include international profiles in its different committees.

Regarding the training of experts, it is evident to the panel that experts are trained appropriately through different tools the Agency has put in place: protocols, compulsory training on the process experts are involved in, additional training available on the Moodle platform and the availability of staff members to answer any questions or organize a one to one or panel meeting under request.

Panel recommendation

6. The panel recommends ACCUEE to include professional representatives in the experts' panels for the ex-post accreditation site-visit and report.

Panel suggestion for further improvement

7. The panel suggests ACCUEE to involve international experts in the Agency's EQA procedures.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

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

Evidence

The procedures and criteria on which decisions are based are publicly available on ACCUEE's website and on the Moodle platform for experts. The minimum threshold criteria are defined by law and are embedded in the protocols established by REACU, ANECA and as well by ACCUEE used for the three-steps accreditation of study programmes. Criteria are specific to each accreditation procedure and detailed in a different protocol for ex-ante accreditation, monitoring and ex-post accreditation of study programmes.

ACCUEE has put in place several instruments to guarantee the consistency of accreditations that apply to all its processes in place:

- **HEIs** can evaluate to what extent the standards were clear and understandable and comment on this thanks to the annual questionnaire sent to the HEIs in the framework of the ACCUEE Listens tool and meta-evaluation reports produced. They also are trained and have access to information on QA.
- **Protocols:** The Agency provides, in all its protocols, an explanation for each standard that could be compared to the ESG. This helps HEIs, the experts and the Agency to have a consistent interpretation of standards.
- **Experts** (experts' panels and members of TC) are carefully selected (see ESG 2.4) and trained on the set of criteria that apply to the procedures they are involved in.
- **ACCUEE's technical staff** have the responsibility to act as the standard-keeper during the whole process. It is in their scope of responsibility to ensure professional conduct and correct use and interpretation of standards and requirement during the whole process. They provide technical support and expertise to HEIs, to the Technical Committees and to experts' panels in the case of the ex-post accreditation of study programmes. They participate in the Technical Committees and site-visits as non-voting members but guarantee that the protocols are consistently applied. They screen the external reports and make sure it is consistent in terms of analysis of the criteria and judgements.
- **Decision-making** is ensured thanks to several steps that ensure the consistency of outcomes and judgments, as the panel could confirm during the interviews and through the analysis of Protocols and external reports published on the Agency's website. The external evaluation report is written by the Technical Committees based on the experts' panel report, screened by ACCUEE's staff for a technical review and sent to HEIs for comments. Once this process is finalised, the Technical Committee report, with a proposal for accreditation, is sent to the Council of Universities who takes the decision on accreditation.

Analysis

The panel considers that the protocols and criteria used by ACCUEE for its different accreditation processes are clearly defined in the legal framework and publicly available on the Agency's website. All protocols and documents are easily accessible to all stakeholders. Experts panels are supported with all relevant information via Moodle platform. Experts are prepared through an efficient training and feel comfortable with the level of knowledge and interpretation of criteria they have before starting an accreditation procedure (including students). Then, the protocols, containing the process and criteria, are pre-defined and publicly available as expected in the ESG 2.5.

Regarding consistency, the various instruments that ACCUEE has in place are adequate as confirmed by experts but also by HEIs who went through one of the accreditation procedures. The criteria are supported by clear guidelines and evidence that leads to a better common interpretation of what is expected.

Reports are based on a sound template covering an analysis for each criterion of a procedure, an evaluation, strengths, and areas of improvement, all this adapted for the different steps of the accreditation of study programmes, based on the large number of reports consulted by the panel.

The implication of the technical staff to support the experts in the Technical Committees and experts' panels and their deep knowledge of criteria and reports from other Committees is an efficient way to ensure consistency all along an accreditation procedure. It is particularly valued by HEIs, and experts as transmitted to the panel during the interviews.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

Evidence

Publication of reports:

Reports produced by the Technical Committees involved in EQA activities carried out by ACCUEE are all published on the website in full, along with their proposal for accreditation but without a HEI's statement. The panel was provided with evidence during the site-visit that there is no specific reason for this and that statements actually are allegations that are not compulsory. It is a voluntary step HEIs can choose to use or not.

The SAR states that both the positive and negative reports are published, and the Director confirmed that to the panel, during the interview. However, the panel could not find any negative report in the consultation of a large sample of ex-post accreditation reports. The panel did find, however, negative evaluations in the monitoring reports, associated to the corresponding conditions and recommendations for improvement addressed to the HEI.

The publication process of reports for the monitoring and ex-post accreditation of study programmes is the following:

1. For ex-post accreditation of study programmes, the experts' panels draft a site-visit report sent to the Technical Committee
2. The Technical Committee drafts a first version of the ERR
3. The staff of ACCUEE carries out a technical screening of the report
4. The Report is sent to the university who has 20 days to make allegations (factual and non-factual)
5. Allegations are reviewed by the Technical Committees who integrate modifications or not in the ERR
6. A final version of the Report is validated by the Technical Committee, published on ACCUEE's website and sent to the Council of Universities

ACCUEE created a public tool to make reports more accessible: *ACCUEE Qualifications Register* with a search engine allowing to consult all the reports of a specific study programme.

Content, consistency, and purpose of reports:

Based on the information provided the panel learned that all reports are elaborated based on a template provided by ACCUEE to the experts of the Technical Committees and experts' panels for site-visits. ACCUEE's technical staff coordinates the process and supervises reports to follow the required structure, while doing so consistency in quality is ensured.

The final reports contain the name of the programme under evaluation and the university where it is delivered, an assessment of formal requirements (against the pre-defined criteria), including strengths, recommendations and suggestions for improvement and a formal conclusion in the form of a proposal for accreditation in the framework of the ex-post accreditation of study programmes.

The monitoring of study programmes does not lead to any formal decision.

As mentioned under ESG 2.3 and 2.5, consistency is safeguarded due to several mechanisms and particularly the close support of ACCUEE's staff all along the different accreditation processes.

During the interviews, HEIs representatives underlined the quality of the documents and appreciate the usefulness of the reports produced, particularly with regards recommendations and strong points, important for the internal quality assurance follow-up.

Analysis

Publication of reports:

ACCUEE does not take any formal decision on accreditation, it is the role of the Council of Universities. Nevertheless, the Agency publishes the full ERR, which have been drafted by experts' panels and validated by the Agency's Technical Committees including a formal decision's proposal.

Nonetheless, the panel could verify that the HEI's statements, taking the form of allegations, is not included in the final reports and thus not available publicly. ACCUEE should reflect on a way to include these allegations to its reports. In addition, the Agency should reflect on the differentiation on allegations. It should be clearly communicated on whether allegations deal with factual errors or if they address diverging views and opinions on the experts' statements and assessments taken.

Regarding accessibility, reports are easily localizable as far as there is a dedicated tool, the "*ACCUEE Qualifications Register*", which link is included in the menu of each accreditation procedure for study programmes on the Agency's website.

Content and purpose of reports:

It is clear to the panel that reports are structured, detailed and contain all the necessary elements to provide HEIs with useful recommendations to improve their internal quality assurance system and study programmes. Both the reports themselves and the feedback from stakeholders confirmed that the design, content, and objectives are fit for purpose. The quality of reports is perceived positively by stakeholders and the panel.

Reports are easy to read and understand and the panel could not identify any need to have a summary report during the interviews with the different stakeholders.

Panel suggestion for further improvement

8. The panel suggests ACCUEE to include a HEI statement in the ERR when they do allegations and to provide a clear differentiation on allegations.

Panel conclusion: 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

Based on the information provided in the SAR and additional clarification the panel agreed on the use of the following terms in order to assess the standard accordingly:

- **Allegations:** HEI's feedback on the draft report they received from the Technical Committees. The feedback provided goes beyond pure factual checking. They are reviewed by the Technical Committees who integrate modifications or not in the final ERR (see ESG 2.6)
- **Appeals:** process allowing a HEI to express disagreement with a final report and/or decision's proposal to the ministerial Council of Universities
- **Complaints:** process allowing the HEIs to express their dissatisfaction about the running of an evaluation process

Allegations:

The monitoring and ex-post accreditation of study programmes include a phase of allegations as described in the protocols published on ACCUEE's website. For both EQA processes, the Technical Committees submit a draft report to the HEI who has 20 working days to send allegations. They can take the form of simple factual errors notifications to a disagreement on a criterion or decision. The HEIs send their allegations directly to ACCUEEs who send it to the Technical Committee who drafted the external report. The Technical Committees evaluate the allegations and modify the report when considered relevant. The final version is then sent to the ministerial Council of Universities for the final decision making and to the HEIs.

As indicated in the SAR in 2021, ACCUEE received a total of 56 allegations: 28 for the administrative task being part of the ex-ante accreditation (not under the ESG), 2 for monitoring and 24 for the ex-post accreditation of study programmes.

Appeals:

Appeals are regulated by law and detailed under Article 19 of the Decree 250/2017 of December 26. For ex-ante and ex-post accreditation of study programmes, it states that HEIs have the possibility to contest a decision by sending a request to the Council of Universities. The Council decides if they maintain their decision or if the appeal (resolution) is accepted.

If it is accepted, the Council can send a detailed request on the appeal to ACCUEE and the same Technical Committee who issued the final report and decision's proposal, would start a new evaluation process, and re-evaluates the case.

If the Council decides to ratify its first decision, the appeal must go to Court through a contentious administrative appeal. As of today, the panel learned that no appeals went to court.

In the case of the monitoring step of the study programmes accreditation, that does not lead to a formal decision, reports are published directly by ACCUEE and not sent to the Council of Universities. Therefore, the only appeal available is the Court.

Complaints:

Complaints are under the regional legislation who centralizes all the elements for the public administration of the Canary Islands. To this effect, a link to the Canarian Government is available and provided in detail on ACCUEE's website. The process for the transmission of complaints from the Ministry to ACCUEE has not been detailed to the panel but HEIs have a legally established possibility to express any dissatisfaction about the running of an evaluation process.

Complaints are centralized by the Ministry and collected through a public link. It is clear, available and HEIs have an access through ACCUEE's website.

Analysis

The appeal and complaints procedures are defined by law and are under the legal competency of the Canarian Government for decision-related processes.

As regards ex-ante and ex-post accreditation of study programmes, there is a clear appeal procedure: HEIs appeal the Ministry who can issue a resolution. If there is no resolution and a disagreement appears, it goes to Court. In the case of an appeal to the Ministry (resolution), it is sent to ACCUEE and reviewed by the same Technical Committee who evaluated, in first instance, the study programme. The process includes a new evaluation of the programme but, as the panel could understand, it is done by the same experts who drafted the first report. The panel is of the opinion that the body which takes the decisions against which the appeal is filed should not be identical with the one in charge of decisions on appeals against its own decision.

If the allegations procedure is efficient as far as no appeals happened to date, it is not an appeal procedure or institutionalized complaints procedure. It does not allow HEIs to express disagreements with the final report drafted by ACCUEE's Technical Committees. It allows HEIs to react to the draft report elaborated by the Technical Committees. Thus, as of today, there is no appeal process at the level of ACCUEE. Although the panel realizes that HEIs can appeal in the ordinary legal way, the panel believes that this legal situation does not legally bar ACCUEE from having an internal appeals process.

Providing such a process will help the Agency and the Ministry with settling disputes at a relatively early stage before the case is filed in a resolution or to the court. Therefore, the panel is of the opinion that the absence of an internal appeal process does not adequately safeguard rights of the HEIs concerned adequately, in addition to the fact that allegations are not joined to the final reports published by the Agency.

Regarding complaints, ACCUEE applies the legal requirements with no additional internal process. The panel recommends the Agency to formalize the complaints process, including the information of when and how the Ministry sends it to the Agency and to communicate on it through its protocols in order to ensure HEIs are informed satisfactorily.

Panel recommendations

7. The panel recommends, when an appeal through a resolution is received by ACCUEE, to appoint experts who did not intervene in the first evaluation, independent from the Technical Committees who ran the first evaluation in order to clearly assure impartiality.

8. The panel recommends ACCUEE to work on an appeal procedure within the Agency in the case of the ex-ante, monitoring and ex-post accreditation of study programmes' procedures. A separate and standing appeal committee should allow to dissociate the decision on the appeal from the Technical Committee that has made the initial decision which is being appealed against.

9. The panel recommends the Agency to formalize the complaints procedure and to communicate more largely on it in its protocols, to ensure HEIs are informed satisfactorily.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

The panel was impressed by the strongly shared and convincingly demonstrated commitment concerning good quality in higher education in this – as stated in the SAR - outmost region of the European Union, the Canary Islands. All stakeholders involved and interviewed during the site-visit underlined that a successful passing of this external review of the Agency will have a valuable impact on further enhancement of quality in higher education, because of the acknowledgment of contributions done by ACCUEE so far.

A registration in EQAR will stress the vast and amply demonstrated efforts towards safeguarding and continuous enhancement of quality in higher education by ACCUEE. In addition, it will also be a recognition of committed shared responsibility for quality in higher education and external quality assurance in the given context.

The universities, ministerial and governmental stakeholders fully support the Agencies activities. However, areas of further improvement on independence, especially concerning the composition of the Governing Board need to be jointly reflected upon. The recommendations issued on this matter need to be taken into joint consideration. Additionally, all relevant stakeholders should as well jointly consider whether the system is ready for a further transfer of competences to the Agency – especially regarding the final decision making on outcomes of various procedures. These of course would lead to a change in the established system and would therefore have an impact on the Agency, their relationships to HEIs, the Ministry and other stakeholders, but overall, in the end it would strengthen ACCUEE's role in the national and regional system. The panel is aware that such a long-term vision would need a sound reflection on the given legal frameworks and regulations, but it would also underline the capacities regarding “doing external quality assurance” in place and it would bring room for overall and other steering tasks in the responsibility of the Ministry for higher education on the Canary Islands.

The panel learned during the whole process to better understand the specificities of the outline of the Spanish external quality assurance system, in particular the challenges of an Agency in this particular environment. ACCUEE is to be considered as a regional QAA in a specific European context; while for long only two public universities have been in place during the last years an increase of private universities implementing their offers, some of them partially - or totally - in online formats.

In addition, the experts increased their awareness thanks to the information provided in the interviews, with respect to that in the SAR, about the specific role of REACU for national/regional QA. The panel appreciates the engaged and committed work of the Agency within REACU – as well as the impact of REACU's work regarding harmonisation of QA in the given national context. However, the panel would like to encourage ACCUEE to develop, beyond established shared responsibilities for methodologies in place, methodologies relevant for the Canarian Higher Education System.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.4:

1. The panel commends the Agency for its formal and regular IQA process, based on a recognized international norm.

ESG 3.6:

2. The panel commends the Agency for this formal and regular process, based on a recognized international norm.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

ESG 3.3:

1. The panel recommends ACCUEE to have an active role in initiating a review of the legal frameworks' definition on the composition and the proportion of governmental members in the GB and specifically the role of chair and vice-chair of the GB should be reconsidered to allow a higher level of independency from the Ministry.

2. The panel recommends ACCUEE's GB to issue its organisational rules for its work, appointment, and dismissal of its members, based on the legal framework.

3. The panel recommends ACCUEE to initiate a reflection with the regional Government on the current process in place regarding the appointment procedure of the director and its role and involvement in different bodies of the Agency.

ESG 2.1:

4. The panel recommends ACCUEE to take ESG part I into account following REACU's protocol as stated by the Agency for the future activities.

ESG 2.2:

5. The panel recommends ACCUEE to carefully analyse the overlapping between the different procedures and particularly linked to the two-steps ex-ante accreditation process leading to two different reports.

ESG 2.4:

6. The panel recommends ACCUEE to include professional representatives in the experts' panels for the ex-post accreditation site-visit and report.

ESG 2.7:

7. The panel recommends, when an appeal through a resolution is received by ACCUEE, to appoint experts who did not intervene in the first evaluation, independent from the Technical Committees who ran the first evaluation in order to clearly assure impartiality.

8. The panel recommends ACCUEE to work on an appeal procedure within the Agency in the case of the ex-ante, monitoring and ex-post accreditation of study programmes' procedures. A separate and standing appeal committee should allow to dissociate the decision on the appeal from the Technical Committee that has made the initial decision which is being appealed against.

9. The panel recommends the Agency to formalize the complaints procedure and to communicate more largely on it in its protocols, to ensure HEIs are informed satisfactorily.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

ESG 3.1:

1. The panel suggests including international representatives in the various governing, strategic, and operational bodies of the Agency.

ESG 3.5:

2. The panel suggests giving ACCUEE the direct authority on the recruitment of its staff, through public services or not.

3. The panel suggests that, in the current recruitment process, job profiles are defined by the Agency based on the identified needs.

ESG 2.1:

4. The panel suggests ACCUEE to evaluate the efficiency of the pilot process for further improvement in the upcoming future, as far as the monitoring protocol is being piloted and in light of the last survey results based on the HEIs answers.

ESG 2.2:

5. The panel suggests ACCUEE to adapt the ex-post accreditation and future ex-ante accreditation protocol as well as the Docentia procedures to the specificities of the CIHES.

6. Based on the legal requirement and on the identification of a high level of workload for HEIs, the panel suggests ACCUEE to develop the institutional accreditation process in a near future.

ESG 2.4:

7. The panel suggests ACCUEE to involve international experts in the Agency's EQA procedures.

ESG 2.6:

8. The panel suggests ACCUEE to include a HEI statement in the ERR when they do allegations and to provide a clear differentiation on allegations.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Schedule for ACCUEE Site-visit 14-17/06/2022

SESSION	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW (title)
14/06/2022			
1	15h00 – 19h00	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day 1	Panel members
15/06/2022			
2	09h00 - 09h30	Review panel's private meeting	Panel members
3	09h30 – 10h15	Meeting with the Director	Director of ACCUEE
	10h15 – 10h30	Review panel's private discussion	Panel members
6	10h30 – 11h15	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report	1. University Quality Assurance and Forecasting Staff 2. University Quality Assurance and Forecasting Staff
	11h15 – 11h30	Review panel's private discussion	Panel members
7	11h30 – 12h15	Meeting with key staff of the agency/staff in charge of external QA activities	1. University Assessment Technical Staff 2. University Assessment Technical Staff 3. University Assessment Technical Staff
	12h15 – 13h15	Lunch (panel only)	Panel members
8	13h15 – 14h00	Meeting with representatives of ANECA	President of ANECA's Internationalisation Commission
	14h00 –	Review panel's private discussion	Panel members

SESSION	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW (title)
	14h15		
9	14h15 – 15h00	Meeting with department/key body of the agency	1. Head of Service 2. Economic Technical Staff 3. Head of Section 4. Economic Technical Staff 5. Secretary
	15h00 – 15h45	Review panel's private discussion	Panel members
10	15h45 – 16h30	Meeting with department/key body of the agency 2	IQA: 1. Head of Service 2. Service Manager Thematic analysis: 1. University Quality Assurance and Forecasting Staff 2. University Quality Assurance and Forecasting Staff
11	16h30 – 18h00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day II	Panel members
16/06/2022			
12	09h00 – 09h30	Review panel's private meeting	Panel members
13	09h30 – 10h15	Meeting with ministry representatives (where relevant)	1. General Director of Universities 2. Minister of Education
	10h15 – 10h30	Review panel's private discussion	Panel members
14	10h30 – 11h15	Meeting with heads of some reviewed HEIs/ HEI representatives	1. Vice-Rector for Teaching Innovation, Quality and Anchieta Campus. ULL 2. Vice-rector for Undergraduate, Postgraduate and New Degrees ULPG 3. Rector of UFP Canarias
	11h15 – 11h30	Review panel's private discussion	Panel members

SESSION	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW (title)
15	11h30 – 12h15	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs	1. Director of the ULL Degrees Secretariat 2. ULL Quality Assurance officer 3. UEC Quality Assurance officer
	12h15 – 13h15	Lunch (panel only)	Panel members
16	13h15 – 14h00	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool (1)	1. Monitoring Academic Member 2. Implementation Academic Member 3. Accreditation Renewal Academic Member 4. Accreditation Renewal IQA expert
	14h00 – 14h15	Review panel's private discussion	Panel members
17	14h15 – 15h00	Meeting with the Governing Board	1. Vice Minister of Education. Vice-chair of the governing board 2. Rector UEC 3. Secretary of the Social Council of the ULPGC 4. Student representative of public universities (ULPGC) 5. Student representative of public universities (ULL)
	15h00 – 15h15	Review panel's private discussion	Panel members
18	15h15 – 16h00	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool (2)	1. Accreditation Renewal Professionals Member 2. Accreditation Renewal Student Member 3. Monitoring Student Member
19	16h00 – 18h00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day III and provisional conclusions	Panel members
17/06/2022			
20	9h00-10h00	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	Panel members
21	10h00 à 11h00	Meeting with Director to clarify any pending issues	Director of ACCUEE
22	11h00-12h30	Private meeting between panel members to agree on the main findings	Panel members
	12h30-13h30	Lunch (panel only)	Panel members

SESSION	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW (title)
23	13h30-14h00	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Council/Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	1. Director of ACCUEE 2. Head of Service 3. Service Manager

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the Canarian Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ACCUEE) by ENQA

Annex I:

TRIPARTITE TERMS OF REFERENCE BETWEEN ACCUEE, ENQA AND EQAR

October 2021

1. Background and context

ACCUEE (Canarian Agency for University Quality and Educational Evaluation) was created as ACECAU (Canary Islands Agency for the Evaluation of University Quality and Accreditation) by Law 2/2002 of March 27, on the establishment of tax rules and measures for Administrative Organization and Management. In 2012, by Law 4/2012, of June 25, on Administrative and Fiscal Measures, the agency was renamed as ACCUEE and assumed new functions for Non-University Evaluation and Educational Quality. ACCUEE is responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching in universities located in the Canary Islands, a territory listed as an outermost region (OR) of the European Union in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. ACCUEE has own legal personality and full capacity to act for the fulfilment of its purposes. ACCUEE operates in accordance with the provisions of Decree 250/2017, of 26 December. It is publicly owned and its basic administrative activity is governed by the laws that regulate the legal regime of public administrations and common administrative procedures. ACCUEE is within the legal framework of the Regional Department of Education, Universities, Culture and Sports.

As a quality assurance agency, it carries out the following evaluation activities of Official Degrees within the scope of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG): Validation for the authorization of new programmes, Monitoring and Accreditation and Validation for the authorization of university institutions. ACCUEE also carries out studies, analyses and events in support of the University System.

ACCUEE has been an affiliate of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since December 2007 and is applying for ENQA membership.

ACCUEE is applying for inclusion on EQAR.

2. Purpose and scope of the review

This review will evaluate the extent to which ACCUEE (the agency) complies with each of the standards of Parts 2 and 3 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) and support the agency in its efforts to continually review and enhance its work. Such an external review is a requirement for agencies wishing to apply for ENQA membership and/or for EQAR registration.

2.1 Activities of the agency within the scope of the ESG

To apply for ENQA membership and EQAR registration, this review will analyse all of the agency's activities that fall within the scope of the ESG, e.g., reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditations of

higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). All activities are reviewed irrespective of geographic scope (within or outside the EHEA) or whether they are obligatory or voluntary in nature.

The following activities of Study Programmes of the agency must be addressed in the external review:

A. Study Programmes:

- Validation for the authorization of new programmes
- Monitoring
- Accreditation

B.- Higher Education Institutions:

- Institutional evaluations including validation for the authorization of university institutions, docentia, audit, institutional accreditation, evaluation of universities and university centers.

While these 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.

2.2 Activities of the agency outside the scope of the ESG

The agency also carried out the following activities outside the scope of ESG:

- Evaluation of other Education Sectors
- Teaching Staff Accreditation
- Evaluation for the assignment of salary complements

While these activities are not relevant to the application for inclusion on EQAR, the review should address how ACCUEE ensures a clear distinction between external quality assurance within the scope of the ESG and these other fields of work

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 review procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of, and agreement on the Terms of Reference for the review between ACCUEE, ENQA and EQAR (including publishing of the Terms of Reference on ENQA's website²);
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by ENQA;
- Notification of EQAR about the appointed panel;
- Self-assessment by the agency, including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit of the agency by the review panel;
- Preparation and completion of the final review report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final review report by ENQA's Agency Review Committee;
- Publication of the final review report;

² The agency is encouraged to publish the ToR on its website as well.

- A decision from the EQAR Register Committee on the agency's registration on EQAR;
- A decision from the ENQA Board on ENQA membership;
- Follow-up on the panel's recommendations to the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review panel

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 potentially a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members serves 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. In this case, an additional fee is charged to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Review Coordinator (an ENQA staff member) who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements are met throughout the process. The Review Coordinator 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 the agency with the proposed panel composition and the curricula vitarum of the panel members to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The reviewers will have to agree to a non-conflict of interest statement that is incorporated in their contract for the review of this agency.

3.2 Self-assessment by the agency, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

The agency is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and must adhere to 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 expected to contain:
 - a brief description of the HE and QA system;
 - the history, profile, and activities of the agency;
 - a presentation of how the agency addresses each individual standard of Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG for each of the agency's external QA activities, with a brief, critical reflection on the presented facts;
 - opinions of stakeholders;
 - the instances of partial compliance noted in the most recent EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal and any other aspects that may have been raised by the EQAR Register Committee in subsequent change report decisions (if relevant);
 - reference to the recommendations provided in the previous review and actions taken to meet those recommendations;
 - a SWOT analysis;
 - reflections on the agency's key challenges and areas for future development.

- All the agency's external QA activities (as defined under section 2.1) are described and their compliance with the ESG is analysed in the SAR.
- The report is well-structured, concise, and comprehensive. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which the agency performs its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG.

The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat, which has two weeks to carry out a screening. The purpose of a screening 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 rather whether or not the necessary information, as outlined in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*, is present. If 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 ask for a revised version within two weeks.

The final version of the agency's self-assessment report is then submitted to the review panel a minimum of eight weeks prior to the site visit. The agency publishes the completed SAR on its website and sends the link to ENQA. ENQA will publish this link on its website as well.

3.3 A site visit by the review panel

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which must be submitted to the agency at least six weeks 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 must be given to the agency at least one month before the site visit to properly organise the requested interviews.

In advance of the site visit (ideally at least two weeks before the site visit), the panel will organise an obligatory online meeting with the agency. This meeting is held to ensure that the panel reaches a sufficient understanding of:

- The specific national/legal context in which the agency operates;
- The specific quality assurance system to which the agency belongs;
- The key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities.

The review panel will be assisted by the ENQA Review Coordinator during the site visit. The review coordinator will act as the panel's chief liaison with the agency, monitor the integrity of the review process and its consistency, and ensure that ENQA's overall expectations of the review are considered and met.

The site visit will close with a final debriefing meeting in which the panel outlines its general impressions and provides an overview of the judgement on the agency's ESG compliance. The panel will not comment on whether or not the agency would be granted/reconfirmed membership with ENQA or registration on EQAR.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final review report

Based on the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will follow the purpose and scope of the review as defined under sections 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for the panel's findings concerning each standard of Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind EQAR's *Policy on Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies*³ to ensure that the report contains sufficient information for the Register Committee to consider the agency's application for registration on EQAR.

³ Available at: <https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>

A draft will first be submitted to the ENQA Review Coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity, and language, and it will then be submitted to the agency – usually within 10 weeks of the site visit – for comment on factual accuracy and grave misunderstandings only. The agency will be given two weeks to do this and should not submit any additional material or documentation at this stage. Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the agency's feedback on possible factual errors and finalise and submit the review report to ENQA.

The report should be finalised within three months of the site visit and will normally not exceed 40-50 pages in length.

3.5. Publication of the report and a follow-up process

The agency will receive the review panel's report and publish it on its website once the Agency Review Committee has validated the report. The report will also be published on the ENQA website together with the statement of the Agency Review Committee validating external review reports by assessing the integrity of the review process and checking the quality and consistency of the reports. Importantly, during this process, and prior to final validation of the report, the Agency Review Committee has the option to request additional (documentary) evidence or clarification from the review panel, review coordinator or the agency if needed. The review report will be published on ENQA website regardless of the review outcome.

As part of the review's follow-up activities, the agency commits to react on the review recommendations and submit a follow-up report to ENQA within two years of the validation of the final external review report. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website.

The follow-up report may be complemented by an optional progress visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). The visit, which normally takes place 2-3 years after the verification of the final external review report (and after submission of the follow-up report), aims to offer an enhancement-oriented and strategically driven dialogue that ordinarily might be difficult to truly integrate in the compliance-focused site visit. The progress visit thus does not have the objective of checking the agency's ESG compliance or how the agency has followed up on the recommendations, but rather provides an arena for strategic conversations that allow the agency to reflect on its key challenges, opportunities, and priorities. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

4. Use of the report

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

The report is used as a basis for the Register Committee's decision on the agency's registration on EQAR. In the case of an unsuccessful application to EQAR, the report may also be used by the ENQA Board to reach a conclusion on whether the agency can be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The review process is thus designed to serve two purposes. In any case, the review report should only be considered final after validation by the Agency Review Committee. After submission to ENQA but before validation by the ARC, the report may not be used or relied upon by the agency, the panel, or any third party and may not be disclosed without ENQA's prior written consent. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on EQAR registration or ENQA membership.

For the purposes of EQAR registration, the agency will submit the review report (once validated by the Agency Review Committee) to EQAR via email. The agency should also include its self-

assessment report (in a PDF format), a Declaration of Honour, and any other documents that may be relevant for 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 as stipulated in the indicative review schedule below and before the decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board.

To apply for ENQA membership, the agency is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which the agency expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be considered by the Board together with the confirmation of EQAR listing when deciding on the agency's membership. Should the agency not be granted the registration in EQAR or the registration is not renewed, the decision on ENQA membership will be taken based on the final review report, the application letter, and the statement from the Agency Review Committee. The decision on membership will be published on ENQA's website.

5. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	November 2021
Appointment of review panel members	November 2021
Self-assessment completed	December 2021
Screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator	December 2021
Preparation of the site visit schedule and indicative timetable	February 2021
Briefing of review panel members	March 2021
Review panel site visit	June 2022
Draft of review report and its submission to ENQA Review Coordinator for verification of its compliance with the Guidelines	July 2022
Draft of review report to be sent for a factual check to the agency	August 2022
Agency statement on the draft report to the review panel (if necessary)	September 2022
Submission of the final report to ENQA	September 2022
Validation of the review report by the Agency Review Committee	October 2022
Publication of report	October 2022
EQAR Register Committee meeting and initial consideration	November/December 2022
Decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board	December 2022

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ACCUEE	Canarian Agency for Quality Assessment & Accreditation
AC	Advisory Council
ACECAU	Canary Islands Agency for Quality Assurance and Assessment in Higher Education
ANECA	National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain
CIHEA	Canary Islands Higher Education Area
CIHES	Canary Islands Higher Education System
CURSA	University Commission for the Regulation of follow-up and renewal of accreditation
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>
GB	Governing Board
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
QA	quality assurance
QAA	quality assurance agencies
REACU	Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies
SAR	self-assessment report
TC	Technical Committees

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ACCUEE

I. Jointly with the SAR

- Link to the Decree 31/1995
- Link to the Organic Law 1/1990 on the General Planning of the Education System
- Link to the Organic Law 6/2001 on universities
- Link to Law 2/2002
- Link to Royal Decree 1393/2007
- Link to Decree 168/2008
- Link to Royal Decree 1892/2008
- Link to Decree 861/2010
- Link to Royal Decree 99/2011
- Link to Law 4/2012 on Administrative and Fiscal Measures
- Link to the Royal Decree 534/2013
- Link to the Decree 250/2017, dated 26 December
- Link to the Organic Law 1/2018 on the Reform of the Status of Autonomy of the Canary Islands
- Link to the Royal Decree 822/2021
- Link to Canary Islands Higher Education Institutions' webpages
- Link to the Qualifications Register
- Link to the Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT)
- Link to data on official study programmes for the Canary University System
- Link to the Strategic Plan
- Link to the employees list
- Link to the Technical Committee and experts' panels composition
- Link to the Code of Ethics
- Link to the financial reporting of the Agency
- Link to social media of the Agency: Twitter, Youtube and LinkedIn
- Link to the IV Educational Innovation Week
- Link to the online webinars organized by the Agency
- Link to the protocols and report templates of the ex-ante, monitoring and ex-post accreditation of study programmes
- Link to the CURSA protocol
- Link to ACCUEE Listens
- Link to the quality process map
- Link to the quality manual
- Link to the certification report for the ISO 9001
- Link to Audit reports of the Canarian universities
- Link to training courses for the experts
- Link to Moodle classrooms
- Link to the recording of online events
- Link to the international events for staff
- Link to the procedure for the selection and composition of Technical Committees
- Link to complaints and suggestions section
- Link to the information on the Public Administration suggestions and complaints service
- Link to the Transparency Commissioner

2. Additional evidence requested before and during the visit

- Agreement with ANECA regarding DOCENTIA
- Examples of actions with REACU to regulate the legal framework
- REACU protocols
- Follow-up of the strategic objectives
- Link to the database of quantitative indicators for the monitoring of programmes
- Criteria for the evaluation of online degrees.
- Description of the Governing Board's functions
- Summary of all the terms related to the assessment commissions/technical committees, accreditation committee, panels, etc.
- Policy for the remuneration and appointment of experts
- Updated process map (IQA)
- Examples of allegations from HEIs

OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

- ACCUEE website
- ANECA website
- Quality policy
- Ex-ante, monitoring and ex-post accreditation reports
- Report of the Spanish government "Data and Numbers of the Spanish Higher Education System", 2021 and 2022

ENQA AGENCY REVIEW 2022

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Canarian Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ACCUEE), undertaken in 2022.

enqa.

European Association for
Quality Assurance in Higher Education