

Substantive Change Report by Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU)

Register Committee
1-2 July 2021

Ref. RC30/C61

Ver. 1.0

Date 2021-07-09

Page 1 / 3

Decision of: 02/07/2021

Report received on: 11/05/2021

Agency registered since: 05/12/2008

Last external review report: 21/06/2017

Registration until: 30/06/2022

Absented themselves from
decision-making: n/a

Attachments: [1. AQU Substantive Change Report, 11/05/21](#)
[2. Clarification request of 14/06/21](#)
[3. Clarification response of 21/06/21](#)

1. The Register Committee considered the Substantive Change Report of 11/05/2021.
2. The Register Committee took note of AQU's use of the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the development of an ex-ante accreditation for short learning programmes/microcredentials.
3. Based on the information provided in the Substantive Change Report and within the annexed Guide to the ex-ante accreditation of Joint Programmes, the Register Committee noted that AQU has further introduced a number of stipulations that are part of the legal requirements in Spain to the existing standards of the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. While a number of stipulations were added, the Committee had no concerns that the ESG are complied with in the case of the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*. **The Committee nevertheless expects that this activity to be analysed in full as part of AQU's next renewal of registration.**
4. The Committee understood that the *ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes/microcredentials* follows the same process as the validation (ex-ante accreditation) of bachelor and master programmes.
5. The guidelines were developed in cooperation with the Secretariat for Universities and Research, the Catalan Public Employment Service and the Catalan Consortium for Continuous Education and Training (ESG 2.2) and received support from the Barcelona Digital Talent alliance.

6. The Committee was unclear whether there are differences in the standards and criteria introduced for the new activity and has therefore asked AQU to further elaborate on this (ESG 2.1/ESG 2.5). The Committee noted from AQU's explanation (see response letter of 21/06/21) that the adaptations to the standards and criteria were minor and that these addressed the following: (1) a description of the programme which is focused on learning outcomes (based on knowledge, skills and competences); (2) an increased participation of teaching staff from the professional sector in order to improve the link with the labour market and (3) the removal of the programme implementation calendar. The Register Committee welcomed the clarification and considered that the adaptations seemed understandable in light of the specific nature of short learning programmes.
7. No site-visits are used, as the assessment follows the same process as in the case of other ex-ante procedures carried out by AQU. A follow-up is required to be carried out internally by the higher education institution for its short learning programmes/microcredentials at least once every six years (ESG 2.3). As short learning programmes /microcredentials are designed to respond swiftly to the needs of the labour market, the Register Committee considered that the long internal follow-up might be insufficient to ensure that the programme remains fit for purpose and up to date. **The Committee therefore underlined that internal QA processes (see ESG 1.9) should be expected to envisage a more frequent follow-up of short learning programmes/microcredentials.**
8. The expert team selection process follows AQU's usual practice, and includes representatives of the teaching staff, professionals, students and methodologists (ESG 2.4).
9. In the Substantive Change Report AQU stated that the results of its ex-ante accreditation are published on its website. The Register Committee was unclear if the reports for short learning programmes/microcredentials are also published when the decision is negative. The agency explained that, since 2019, the agency has also published all reports with a negative decision, including those from its ex-ante accreditation procedures. The agency confirmed that this practice will also be applied to short learning programme/microcredentials. The Committee could verify that on the agency's website ex-ante accreditations with a negative decision were indeed published.
10. Decisions on ex-ante accreditation can be appealed under AQU's generic appeals regulations (ESG 2.7).
11. All usual internal quality assurance measures (ESG 3.6) and thematic analyses (ESG 3.4) follow the same plan for short learning programmes/microcredentials as for the other external QA activities carried out by AQU.

Register Committee

1-2 July 2021

Ref. RC30/C61

Ver. 1.0

Date 2021-07-09

Page 2 / 3

12. The Register Committee also took note of the *short degree learning programmes/microcredentials* and expects that this activity to be analysed in full as part of AQU's next renewal of registration.

Register Committee

1-2 July 2021

Ref. RC30/C61

Ver. 1.0

Date 2021-07-09

Page 3 / 3

EQAR Substantive Change Report

Agency #1	AQU - Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
Expiry date #1	30/06/2022
Contact #1	Maria Giné
Phone #1	+34 93 268 89 50
Email #1	secretariat@aqu.cat
Other organisations?	No
A. Has the organisational identity of the registered agency changed?	No
B. Has the organisational structure changed?	No
C.i. Are there new types of activities?	Yes
C.ii. Are there changes in existing activities?	No
C.iii. Have some or all existing activities been discontinued?	No

Description new/changed

We have just started two new review activities:

1. We have started to use the European Approach for joint programmes in the ex-ante review of two masters. We include the Guide to ex-ante accreditation of joint programmes using the European Approach.
(<https://www.aqu.cat/en/universities/titulacions/European-Approach>)

2. We have started a pilot project reviewing Short Learning Programmes/Microcredentials. This activity is based on the validation (ex-ante assessment). The key aspects are:

i. Purpose and development of the activity, involvement of stakeholders (ESG 2.2)
During 2020, AQU Catalunya introduced a new procedure for the validation (ex-ante accreditation) of short learning programmes/microcredentials linked to the Catalan Public Employment Service's Catalogue of Training in Specialised Fields. The guidelines were developed in cooperation with the Secretariat for Universities and Research, the Catalan Public Employment Service and the Catalan Consortium for Continuous Education and Training. It is also supported by the Barcelona Digital Talent alliance, which includes Mobile World Capital-Barcelona, among others.

ii. Criteria used, how they were developed, measures implemented to ensure consistency, how EST 1.1 – 1.10 are reflected in the criteria (ESG 2.1 & 2.5)
The criteria and standards used in the evaluation are mostly the same than those one used in the validation (ex-ante accreditation) of bachelors and master's programmes. They follow the ESG...

... part 1. More information at:

<https://www.aqu.cat/en/universities/titulacions/Validation-ex-ante-assessment>

iii. Review team composition, selection, appointment and training of reviewers (ESG 2.4)

Experts participating in the validation of the short learning programmes/microcredentials includes representatives from teaching staff, professionals, students and methodologist. External experts are selected from the Agency's reviewer database. The validation of short learning programmes/microcredentials follows the standard procedures of the Agency in relation with the selection, appointment and training.

iv. Site visits (ESG 2.3)

The validation (ex-ante accreditation) of short learning programmes/microcredentials doesn't include a site visit, using the same procedure as the ex-ante accreditation of bachelors and master's programmes.

v. Publication of reports (ESG 2.6)

Reports are made fully published at the end of the process on AQU Catalunya website according to AQU Catalunya's procedures. Currently, they are published in this website <https://www.aqu.cat/universitats/titulacions/Verificacio>, and we are working to publish them at DEQAR.

vi. Follow-up (ESG 2.3)

The validation of short learning programmes/microcredentials includes a follow-up, at least each six years. The follow-up is mandatory, but internal to the higher education institution.

vii. Appeals System (ESG 2.7)

This process includes the regular appeals System. AQU's Appeals Committee is the body...

... responsible for reviewing the appeals in relation to decisions adopted by different bodies / commissions.

viii. Embedding in thematic analyses and internal quality assurance of the agency (ESG 3.4 & 3.6)

The short learning programme's/microcredential's review is included in the thematic analysis activities annually planned by AQU Catalunya.

This new activity follows the procedures included in the internal quality assurance system of AQU Catalunya.

File #1

[Guide_Ex-ante_European_Approach.pdf](#)
(569k)

EQAR | Aarlenstraat 22 rue d'Arlon | BE-1050 Brussels

Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency

Maria Gine

– by email: – secretariat@aqu.cat

Brussels, 14 June 2021

Change report by AQU - Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency

Dear Maria,

We wish to thank you for the Substantive Change Report of 11/05/2021. Your report is currently being reviewed by two rapporteurs before it is brought to the attention of the entire EQAR Register Committee.

In order to prepare the consideration by the Committee, we would be obliged if you could clarify the following matters related to the newly introduced pilot procedure reviewing short learning programmes/ microcredentials:

1. ESG 2.1/ESG 2.5: We understand that the standards and criteria used in the review of short learning programmes is based and mostly the same as in the case of the validation of ex-ante evaluations of bachelors and master's programmes. Could you please elaborate on the differences in the standards and criteria between the two procedures and how AQU ensured alignment of the standard with ESG Part 1?
2. ESG 2.6: With a view to AQU's publication policy we understand that all reports are published except the results of an ex-ante evaluation in case of negative decision. Are the reports of short learning programmes/microcredentials published when the decision is negative?

In order to expedite proceedings we kindly ask you for a reply by 25/06/2021. Please inform us if any difficulties arise in meeting this deadline. Please also note that this request and your response will be published together with the final decision on your Report. I shall be at your disposal if you have any further questions or inquiries.

Kind regards,



Colin Tück
(Director)

European Quality Assurance
Register for Higher Education
(EQAR) asbl

Aarlenstraat 22 rue d'Arlon
1050 Brussels
Belgium

Phone: +32 2 234 39 12
Fax: +32 2 230 33 47

info@eqar.eu
www.eqar.eu

VAT BE 0897.690.557

EQAR Founding Members:



Colin Tück
Director

The European Quality Assurance Register for
Higher Education (EQAR)
By e-mail

Barcelona, 21 June 2021

Dear Colin,

In reply to the letter you sent us on 14th June 2021, we are very pleased to clarify the matters you have raised related to the pilot procedure for the *ex ante* evaluation of short learning programmes (microcredentials):

In relation to ESG 2.1/ESG 2.5: The *ex ante* evaluation of short learning programmes is aligned with the ESG Part 1. It is to note that the standards followed in this programme evaluation are mostly the same as the ones defined for the validation of bachelor and master's degrees. The Agency introduced minor changes to adapt the review procedure to the particularities and context of the short learning programmes in our region. Those are the following ones:

- The description of criteria for level content follows the KSC type (knowledge, skills and competences). This approach allows to design programmes more focused on the learning outcomes or outputs, irrespective of the acquisition routes involved, rather than learning inputs.
- In relation with teaching staff, the review methodology states that there should be a higher participation of teaching staff from the professional sector. This characteristic ensures the link between the short learning programme and the labour market. It is to note that teachers coming from the academia are also involved as they participate in the design step and doing some coordination tasks once the programme is implemented.
- The calendar for implementing the programme is not included in the review of short learning programmes.

It is worth mentioning that the review follows the regular steps of the Agency (expert selection, approval of reports, statutory commissions, appeals, etc.) following ESG Part 2.

With reference to ESG 2.6: [In the follow up report, from the external review 2017](#), prepared in June 2019, we explained that we started to publish at our webpage [EUC Informes](#) (Review reports portal) the non-positive ex-ante accreditation reports issued from January 2019, with a prior warning that explains the program does not exist (see a [recent example](#)). Consequently, this policy also applies to the Short Learning Programmes/Microcredentials. Temporarily, SLP/Microcredentials reports are published on our [corporate webpage](#) while our IT staff is preparing technologically *EUC Informes* portal to host them. To sum up, AQU Catalunya publishes all the reports, positive and negative, of all external review activities.

I hope we have clarified all these matters properly. Otherwise, please, do not hesitate to contact us again for further information.

Sincerely,

Maria Giné-Soca
AQU's Secretary