

Approval of the Application by Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU) for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee
24-25 October 2022

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Application of:	2021-07-28
Agency registered since:	2008-03-04
External review report of:	2022-06-10
Review coordinated by:	European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)
Review panel members:	Anna Klampfer, Bryan Maguire, Terhi Nokkala
Decision of:	
Registration until:	2027-06-30
Absented themselves from decision-making:	Steffen Westergård Andersen
Attachments:	External Review Report, 2022-06-10

1. The application of 2021-07-28 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 2021-09-02.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 2022-06-10 on the compliance of AQU with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).

Analysis:

4. In considering AQU's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:
 - *Validation*
 - *Modification*
 - *Monitoring*
 - *Accreditation*
 - *Institutional accreditation*
 - *Ex-post IQAs certification*

- *International quality assurance*
- *Review of institutions offering foreign degrees*
- *Accreditation of teaching assessment handbooks*
- *European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes (*)*
- *Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes/micro-credentials (*)*

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5. AQU's activities related to *university teaching staff assessment, surveys, international projects* are not within the scope of the ESG and, thus, not pertinent to the agency's registration.

6. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on AQU's level of compliance with the ESG; the activities marked with (*) above were introduced or changed since AQU's last review and were thus subject of the targeted review.

7. With regard to the specific European Standards, the Register Committee considered the following:

ESG 2.1 – Consideration of internal quality assurance

8. The Register Committee noted that in the implementation of ESG 1.9 the review panel considered how AQU's different activities address the cyclicity of *external* reviews. The Committee, however, underlined that the focus of the standard is on the monitoring and periodical review of programmes as part of the institutions internal QA, ensuring that objectives set for the programmes are achieved and that monitoring processes lead to the continuous improvement of the programme.

9. Given that the Register Committee was unable to draw a definitive conclusion on how ESG 1.9 is addressed in AQU's activities, the issue should thus receive close attention in AQU's next review.

10. **The Register Committee concurred with the panel that AQU complies with the standard otherwise.**

ESG 2.6 – Reporting

11. In its previous renewal decision, the Register Committee noted that AQU publishes all reports except those from ex-ante evaluations that result in a negative accreditation decision.

12. The review panel reports that AQU now publishes all review reports, independent of their outcome. The Committee also noted that reports with a negative ex-ante accreditation outcome are released with an initial page warning that the degree will not be taught. While the practice of publishing ex-ante reports with a negative outcome was originally met with unease by the institutions whose study programme was rejected, there now is an agreement within AQU on the value of ensuring accountability and trust in the whole system.

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13. In relation to the AQU reports for the ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes (SLP) and micro-credentials, the Committee noted that the agency struggles in scaling the demands of accrediting such programmes, in particular ensuring the proportionate length and detail in its reporting. The Committee underlined the panel's suggestion on expanding the level of detail and analysis in reports for SLPs to facilitate the usability by various stakeholders and to reflect the detailed evaluation work of the experts.

14. Having considered the change in practice in the publication of negative ex-ante reports, the Register Committee concurred with the panel's conclusion that AQU now complies with ESG 2.6.

ESG 3.3 – Independence

15. In its previous decision the Register Committee underlined the concerns of the panel with regard to the overlap in the composition of the agency's different bodies. The review panel found that AQU has separated the membership of its strategic and oversight bodies from its specific commissions and review panels.

16. The Register Committee welcomed these changes, including the appointment of two non-local members to the Appeals Committee, but noted that the Chair of the Appeals Committee is a member of the Governing Board. While the role of the members in the Governing Board is limited to the strategic decision-making and management of the organisation, the Register Committee found that the involvement of a representative of the Board (in particular as a Chair) in the Appeals Committee might put undue pressure in the discussion and decision-making of the Appeals Committee. The Register Committee nevertheless agreed that the Appeals Committee was sufficiently independent given that the AQU's Governing Board does not adopt the reports or decisions that are being appealed

17. The Register Committee further noted that AQU's funding comes primarily from the Government of Catalonia (about 90% of the agency's budget) and is allocated on an annual basis. The Committee welcomed AQU's plans to move to a four-year contract with the Government of Catalonia, which could further improve its operational independence.

18. Considered the steps taken to separate the membership of the agency's strategic and oversight bodies, the Register Committee could follow the panel's conclusion that AQU now complies with the standard ESG 3.3.

19. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel's analysis and conclusion without further comments.

Conclusion:

20. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that AQU demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

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Standard	Previous decision (2017-11-16)	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.2	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.3	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.4	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.5	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.6	Partial compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.7	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.1	Compliance	<i>(inherited)</i>	Compliance
3.2	Compliance	<i>(inherited)</i>	Compliance
3.3	Partial compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.4	Compliance	<i>(inherited)</i>	Compliance
3.5	Compliance	<i>(inherited)</i>	Compliance
3.6	Compliance	<i>(inherited)</i>	Compliance
3.7	Compliance	<i>(not expected)</i>	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

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21. AQU therefore continues to comply substantially with the ESG as a whole.

22. The Register Committee therefore renewed AQU's inclusion on the Register. AQU's renewed inclusion shall be valid until 2027-06-30¹.

¹ Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §4.1 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.