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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report results from an external review assessing the compliance of the Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (Axencia para a Calidade do Sistema Universitario de Galicia, ACSUG) with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) parts 2 and 3. It is the agency's third review coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and its first under the updated ESG from 2015, which may require the agency to adjust some of its processes. ACSUG is a member of ENQA and has been listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2010. This external review report is based on a review process that uses ACSUG's self-assessment report, a site visit by the ENQA-appointed review panel in Galicia, the information published on ACSUG's website and other information that was provided on the panel's request. The site visit by the peer review panel took place between March 20 and 22, 2019.

The agency performs a broad range of quality assurance activities, varying from the level of individual professors and study programmes to the evaluation of university centres in Galicia, Spain. In addition ACSUG performs external evaluations of degrees and institutions in Latin-America. Based on the Terms of Reference for this review (Annex 2), the panel has analysed the agency's activities at a programme level, institutional level and international evaluations.

The written documentation that the panel reviewed and the interviews with ACSUG's staff, bodies and stakeholders, show that ACSUG is a well-established and respected agency in the Galician University System, Spain and beyond. ACSUG provides predictability of operations through their good forward planning, which is made possible by their multi-annual budgeting. The professionalism of ACSUG's staff is highly valued by all stakeholders, as well as the way they perform their evaluation processes in a consistent, fair and helpful manner. The review panel found ample evidence of the agency's processes being well embedded and accepted, and the role of ACSUG as an instrument for enhancing quality in the university sector was highlighted by most stakeholders. ACSUG gives the impression of being a forerunner and inspirer in the Spanish and international sector. For a small agency with limited resources, the panel finds the way ACSUG is engaged in Latin-America commendable.

The panel also signals some areas for improvement. The agency could further strengthen their expertise and independence by including members from outside Galicia in the Galician Committee for Reports, Assessment, Certification and Accreditation (CGIACA) and Governing Board. Additionally, while the review panel recognises ACSUG has a well working and trustworthy appeals and complaints procedure in place, ACSUG could improve these arrangements to ensure fair decision-making by using an independent body or committee to evaluate decisions made by the initial evaluation committee, prior to juridical procedure. Finally, ACSUG especially has a way to go in developing the activity of thematic analysis. Despite gathering sufficient relevant data through appropriate external review work, this activity has been constrained by a lack of personnel for reasons outside the agency's control. However, the panel sees the agency has sufficient financial resources to outsource work until they fill all vacancies.

The panel found ACSUG's level of compliance with the ESG to be as follows:

- Fully compliant for the following ESGs: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6.
- Substantially compliant in the following ESGs: 2.7, 3.5 and 3.6.
- Partially compliant in ESG 3.4.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (Axencia para a Calidade do Sistema Universitario de Galicia) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted from September 2018 until June 2019 (from self-analysis until the finalisation of the review report).

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 substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is ACSUG's third review, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress from the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach, as the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of the agencies.

ACSUG has requested this review in order to apply for the renewal of its membership of ENQA and EQAR. In this review ACSUG's activities within the scope of the ESG were analysed, as defined in the Terms of Reference for this review (see Annex 2). These are the following of ACSUG's activities:

- Assessment cycle of Galician degrees: validation (ex-ante accreditation), monitoring, modifications and accreditation (cyclical process);
- Joint programme accreditation;
- Assessment of institutional Quality Assurance Systems (FIDES-AUDIT program);
- Institutional accreditation of Galician faculties;
- Teaching performance assessment program (DOCENTIA program);
- Assessment (evaluation and accreditation) of degrees and university centres outside Spain.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2014 REVIEW

The panel is convinced that ACSUG generally complies with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Details of the measure of compliance are given below. The panel recommends to the Board of ENQA that ACSUG's Full Membership of ENQA is to be confirmed for a further period of five years.

The panel concluded that ACSUG generally complied with the ESG 2005 Standards. Detailed findings and recommendations were as follows:

- **ESG 2.1 'Use of internal quality assurance procedures': substantial compliance** (now ESG 2015 Standard 2.1 'Consideration of internal quality assurance')

ACSUG should consider how it might initiate a conversation with the quality Agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA, in order to explore whether and how to devolve more of the operational aspects of those responsibilities to the Universities.

- **ESG 2.2 'Development of external quality assurance processes': substantial compliance** (now partly ESG 2015 Standard 2.2 'Designing methodologies fit for purpose')

As part of its move to adopt a more strategic approach to planning its activities ACSUG should consider how, when setting the aims and objectives for new external quality assurance processes, it could undertake consultations specifically linked to its proposals for changes to its review methods more widely across the Galician Universities and stakeholders rather than rely on undertaking consultations within existing meetings and before asking its Board of Directors to approve them.

- **ESG 2.3 ‘Criteria for decisions’: full compliance** (now ESG 2015 Standard 2.5 ‘Criteria for outcomes’)
- **ESG 2.4 ‘Processes fit for purpose’: substantial compliance** (now partly ESG 2015 Standard 2.2 ‘Designing methodologies fit for purpose’)

ACSUG should continue to seek ways in which expert reviewers from outside Spain and other international experts can contribute to the Agency's reviews and its work more generally.

ACSUG should consider, if appropriate in association with the quality agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA, how it might ensure the inclusion of an element of retrospective critical self-evaluation in submissions for each of the external review processes it operates, in order to encourage the exercise of critical self-reflection on the part of the subjects of its reviews.

ACSUG should reflect carefully on the concerns expressed about the FIDES-AUDIT process in the 2009 Report and this report and seek to initiate a conversation with the quality agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the national agency, ANECA, in order to consider jointly whether, in the interests of supporting the academic autonomy of the universities, including the Galician universities, greater responsibility for the development of internal quality assurance systems should be devolved to the universities while the agency retains responsibility for the quality assurance of the university's internal quality arrangements.

- **ESG 2.5 ‘Reporting’: full compliance** (now ESG 2015 Standard 2.6 ‘Reporting’)

ACSUG should consider how it might communicate the findings of its review reports to a wider readership as students, parents and sponsors, and employers become more sophisticated users of information and data about Universities and their programmes.

ACSUG should check periodically the information needs of students, sponsors employers and Universities as users of its reports, and how its reports can better meet their needs.

- **ESG 2.6 ‘Follow-up Procedures’: full compliance** (now partly ESG 2015 Standard 2.3 ‘Implementing processes’)
- **ESG 2.7 ‘Periodic reviews’: full compliance** (now ESG 2015 Standard 1.10, Cyclical External quality assurance’)

- **ESG 2.8 ‘System-wide analysis’: full compliance** (now ESG 2015 Standard 3.4 ‘Thematic analysis’)
- **ESG 3.1 ‘Use of External Quality Assurance in higher education’ and 3.3: substantial compliance** (now partly ESG 2015 Standard 3.1 ‘Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance’)

ACSUG should consider how it might initiate a conversation with the quality Agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA, in order to explore whether and how to devolve more of the operational aspects of those responsibilities to the Universities.

- **ESG 3.2 ‘Official status’: full compliance** (now ESG 2015 Standard 3.2, ‘Official status’)
- **ESG 3.3 ‘Activities’: full compliance** (now partly ESG 2015 Standard 3.1 ‘Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance’)

ACSUG should explore with its stakeholders whether they would welcome proposals for the external review of Universities as whole academic communities and corporate entities responsible for the quality of their programmes and the academic standards of the awards to which they lead.

- **ESG 3.4 ‘Resources’: substantial compliance** (now ESG 2015 Standard 3.4 ‘Resources’)

ACSUG should set out a five-year strategic plan and forecast budgets for presentation to its Board of Directors in order to plan its capacity to deliver its growing programme of external reviews.

- **ESG 3.5 ‘Mission statement’: substantial compliance** (now partly ESG 2015 Standard 3.1 ‘Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance’)

ACSUG should update its Mission Statement to take account of the Guidelines that accompany ENQA Criterion 4/ESG 3.5 and publish the updated Mission Statement, setting out the division of labour and responsibilities between itself and the Universities and explaining how its Mission is translated into a clear policy and management plan via its Strategic Plan.

- **3.6 ‘Independence’: substantial compliance** (now ESG 2015 Standard 3.3 ‘Independence’)

ACSUG should consider, as it moves to have its new Statutes enacted, whether one of the membership positions for the CGIACA should be reserved for a suitably qualified person from outside Galicia.

- **3.7 ‘External quality assurance criteria and processes used by members’: substantial compliance** (now partly ESG 2015 Standard 2.3 ‘Implementing processes’, Standard 2.4 ‘Peer-review experts’, and Standard 2.7 ‘Complaints and appeals’)

ACSUG should provide clear statements and protocols, procedures and guidance for the Advisory Council to enable it to fulfil its roles of advising on ethics and conflicts of interest.

- **3.8 ‘Accountability procedures’: substantial compliance** (now partly ESG 2015 Standard 3.6 ‘Internal quality assurance and professional conduct’, and Standard 3.7 ‘Cyclical external review of agencies’)
- **ENQA Criterion 8 ‘Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims** (now partly ESG 2015 Standard 2.7 ‘Complaints and appeals’)
ACSUG should set out clear statements, protocols and procedures for the conduct of appeals against the findings of its reviews and evaluations and failure to enforce the "no conflict of interest principle and publish them on its website.

ACSUG should provide clear statements and protocols, procedures and guidance for the Advisory Council to enable it to fulfil its roles of advising on ethics and conflicts of interest.

Following the panel’s recommendations, the Board of ENQA reconfirmed ACSUG’s full membership of ENQA in a letter, dated 26 September 2014. In this letter the Board of ENQA requested a follow-up report on the recommendations in the panel report within 2 years of its decision.

Accordingly, ACSUG sent in a follow-up report in September 2016. The ENQA Board considered the follow-up report in its meeting on 30 November 2016. They express their satisfaction with the achieved improvements in a letter to ACSUG, dated 14 December 2016.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2019 external review of ACSUG was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of ACSUG was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Jon Haakstad (Chair), Former Department Director and Senior adviser, Department of Analysis, NOKUT, Norway;
- Alexandra Raijmakers (Secretary), Student at the University of Oslo, Netherlands (ESU nominee);
- Bryan Maguire, Director of Quality Assurance Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Ireland;
- Carmen Fenoll, Full Professor of Plant Physiology and Head of the Department of Environmental Sciences, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain.

Maria Kelo, director of ENQA, acted as process coordinator for the review.

From September 2018 onwards the panel members had e-mail exchanges about the organisation of the review. The panel received the self-assessment report in January 2019 and had a video conversation in which practical details of the review and its preparations were discussed in February 2019. In the period running up to the visit e-mail exchanges took place regarding the proposed time schedule for the site visit. The panel requested additional documents which they received shortly after on March 18th. Meanwhile the panel secretary had regular contact with the ACSUG review coordinator and ENQA process coordinator.

The main aim of the site visit was to fully validate the information contained in the self-assessment report and clarify any points at issue. The panel confirms that it was given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review. Not all documentation was available in English. The panel members with knowledge of Spanish have analysed the documents which were provided in Spanish and shared their findings with the other panel members. This allowed the panel as a whole to consult all necessary information. Finally, the panel produced this final report based on the self-assessment report, site visit, and its findings.

Self-assessment report

ACSUG started the self-assessment process in summer 2018. In October 2018, the agency held a staff meeting regarding the writing of the self-assessment report. During the staff meeting the structure of the self-assessment report was discussed, they formed teams with specific writing tasks matching their work areas and the structure of the report. They described the chief work as collecting and updating information.

The full draft report was first discussed internally by the ACSUG staff, after which the draft was sent to stakeholders and all ACSUG bodies to ask for feedback. Contacted bodies and stakeholder groups include: the Advisory Council; the Galician Committee for Reports, Assessment, Certification and Accreditation (CGIACA); the ACSUG Governing Board; evaluators including academics, students, and professionals; rectors; and representatives in the Ministry of Education. Following small adaptations to the report it was sent to the Governing Board which approved the SAR on December 17th, 2018.

The final self-assessment report is a 68-page document with 5 annexes consisting of 67 pages. It follows the guidelines as provided by ENQA which made it pleasant to read and easy to understand the structure of the report. The SAR also contained an introduction to the Galician higher education system and explanations on the different tasks of ACSUG. The self-assessment report was clear, informative, and gave an open and honest impression of the agency. The electronic links to policies, procedures and guidelines on the website were very useful. In short, the SAR served as a valuable source of information to the panel. Nevertheless, a more self-critical approach may have been useful, especially in the formation of the SWOT analysis and connecting assessed risks and threats that the agency identified in other documents and meetings of bodies.

Site visit

The site visit took place from 20 to 22 March according to the time schedule as given in Annex 1. The programme included sessions with the SAR team, ACSUG Executive Committee, Governing Board and Advisory council, ACSUG staff and committees, representatives of Galician institutions of higher education, panel members, students, teachers, employers, and three Latin-American institutions.

The visit was well planned and organised. The staff of the agency demonstrated high professionalism during the entire review process and provided excellent assistance to the panel in all matters.

During the site visit panel members had several internal, consensus-forming discussions on each day in the beginning and end of the day, as well as in between interview sessions. On the third and final day of the site visit, the panel held an internal meeting where it agreed on the preliminary conclusions regarding the compliance of ACSUG on each of the standards in part 2 and 3 of the ESG. After the site visit some panel members sent individual notes on specific standards to the secretary, who then compiled a first draft of the review report. The draft was reviewed by all panel members and sent to the ENQA process coordinator in the beginning of June. The draft report was submitted to ACSUG shortly afterwards for factual verifications. The agency had two weeks to provide factual corrections

on the report, in accordance with the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews. The final external review report was presented to the ENQA Board in September 2019.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Legal framework

The legal framework which regulates the university policy in Spain has its origin in the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and its article 27, which recognises university autonomy. Article 148 and 149 specify the distribution of competence between the Spanish State and the different Autonomous Communities.

According to article 149.1 of the Spanish Constitution, the State has exclusive competence to promote scientific and technical coordination and to regulate the conditions for obtaining, issuing and approving academic and professional qualifications. It is also the State that approves the basic regulations for the implementation of article 27 of the Constitution in order to ensure compliance with the obligations of the public authorities in this area.

The Organic Law 6/2001 (LOU) of 21st December 2001, amended by Organic Law 4/2007 (LOMLOU) of 12th April 2007, sets out the basic regulations on a national scale establishing the respective powers and competencies of universities, the national government and the governments of the different Autonomous Communities.

There is a state agency in the Spanish University System, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA). ANECA's task is to exercise university evaluation in the Autonomous Communities that do not have their own quality assurance agency, as well as in the Autonomous Communities with an agency that does not meet the requirements established in the Spanish law (to be registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)) to implement the full range of quality assurance activities such as the evaluation of degrees.

The Spanish State has 17 Autonomous Communities, amongst which is the Autonomous Community of Galicia. Out of the 17 Autonomous Communities 11 have created their own regional evaluation agencies, of which 8 are currently members of ENQA. Currently there are different coordination mechanisms among all Spanish agencies. The most relevant is the Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies (REACU). In the REACU all agencies, including ANECA, have a relationship of equals because each quality assurance agency is autonomous within its territorial scope.

The Galician University System

University education in Galicia dates back to 1495 when the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) was founded, one of the oldest universities in Spain.

With the Law 11/1989 of 20 July on the Regulation of the Galician University System (SUG) and the Decree 3/1990 of 11 January, the Universities of A Coruña and Vigo were created by splitting off and allocating them material and human resources from the USC. The three universities are public universities and have several campuses distributed as follows:

- The University of A Coruña (UDC): campuses in A Coruña and Ferrol

- The University of Santiago de Compostela (USC): campuses in Santiago de Compostela and Lugo
- The University of Vigo (UVI): campuses in Vigo, Ourense and Pontevedra

The Galician Parliament passed the Law 6/2013 of 13 June of the Galician University System (LSUG) with the aim to equip universities to function in a new context and meet current needs of society. This includes the consolidation of the academic system in Galicia into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), attracting a wider cross-section of society and reducing the drop-out rates. The law also covers boosting the numbers and status of research staff, creating a clear and well-defined list of rights, freedoms and obligations of the members of the university community and focusing the management of university activities squarely on the principles of efficiency and effectiveness at a time of economic difficulties both nationally and internationally.

The SUG has established a three-cycle structure of degrees. The bachelor degrees, usually composed of 240 ECTS, aim to provide students with a general education in one or several disciplines and to prepare students for professional activities in this field. The master degrees, usually composed of 60 to 120 ECTS, aims for students to acquire an advanced, specialized or multi-disciplinary learning in a professional or academic specialization. The doctorate degrees aim to train students in advanced research techniques and requires a doctoral thesis consisting of an original piece of research.

University education in Spain and the SUG is divided into five academic fields: Arts and Humanities, Science, Health Sciences, Social and Legal Sciences and Engineering and Architecture. The academic programmes offered by the SUG are wide-ranging and diverse. In the 2018/2019 academic year 124 bachelor degrees, 191 masters and 133 doctorates were taught, including all the branches of knowledge.

In the 2018/2019 academic year 61,021 students were enrolled in the three SUG Universities (UDC, USC, UVI) across all cycles. The student numbers in bachelor degrees have been decreasing gradually from 59,584 students in the 2013-2014 academic year to 50,014 in the 2018-2019 academic year. The population of PhD student has similarly decreased from 6,084 to 5,077 in the same period. Nevertheless, the number of students in master degrees has increased from 5,578 in 2013-2014 to 5,930 in 2018-2019.

Following the general trend in the SUG enrolment, from the 2013-2014 to the 2017- 2018 academic courses, the number of SUG graduates has dropped from 13,804 to 11,524.

However, the number of Teaching and Research Staff (PDI in its Spanish acronym) and Administration and Service Personnel (PAS in its Spanish acronym) in the SUG have remained constant over the last few years. The annual budget of the SUG Universities has remained constant the past five years for UVI, and the UDC and USC budget have risen.

The SAR shows more detailed data of enrolment, graduates, staff and budget of the SUG in Annex 1.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

In line with the division of powers in the Spanish legal framework, the Autonomous Community of Galicia (article 149.1.3 of the Spanish Constitution) assumed full competence in matters of higher education in its Autonomous Community Statutes (Organic Law 1/1981 of 6th of April).

The main rules for development of the higher education system in Galicia were laid down in the regional Law 6/2013 of 13 June 2013 of the Galician University System (LSUG). Article 3 of this law

specifies that the Galician University System is composed of the University of A Coruña, the University of Santiago de Compostela and the University of Vigo, without prejudice to those that might be created or approved by the Galician Parliament in the future.

Additionally, article 69 of the LSUG establishes that ACSUG is the entity that has the competence in quality assessment, within the framework of the Autonomous Community of Galicia, referred to in the LSUG, in the LOU and the other competences that may be attributed to it by the legal system.

The autonomous government of Galicia approved the new ACSUG statutes in January 2018. Article 4 of the statutes expressly establishes that the primary purpose of the agency is to promote and guarantee the quality of the Galician University System in the context of the Autonomous Community of Galicia, and takes responsibility over the achievement of the objectives referred to in Article 31.1 of the LOU and article 69 of the LSUG. Article 7 of the aforementioned statutes specifically details all the functions assigned to it. Responsibilities of autonomous regions include authorisation, modification and termination of official study programmes.

With regard to programme review, the Spanish Government has laid down that degrees and higher education qualifications must follow a system of verification (ex-ante accreditation), modification, monitoring and ex-post accreditation. ACSUG evaluates these degrees in different programmes since 2009.

In 2015, the Spanish Government has added the possibility for university centres (faculties or schools) to obtain institutional accreditation based on the ex-post accreditation of at least half of their official bachelor and master programmes in combination with the accreditation of their internal quality assurance system, according to the AUDIT programme. ACSUG implements this voluntary FIDES-AUDIT (certification of internal quality assurance systems at the level of university centres (faculties or schools)) and DOCENTIA programme (certification of quality assurance of teaching quality of academic staff at university level).

ACSUG

The Axencia para a Calidade do Sistema Universitario de Galicia (ACSUG) (Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System) was legally established on 30 January 2001 as a consortium between the Regional Government of Galicia and the three Galician universities. ACSUG is an independent legal entity.

The agency was one of the first university quality assurance agencies to be established in Spain before national legislation introduced the requirement to do so as a response to the pledge by Galician universities and the Regional Government of Galicia to improve the quality of its university system. Nowadays, it is the key instrument in promoting and evaluating quality in the Galician University System.

The mission of ACSUG is to promote, oversee and guarantee the quality of the Galician University System (SUG), focusing on its continuous improvement and transferring relevant information to society at large about the activities carried out and their results, ensuring that the SUG is constantly adapted to the social and economic situation at any given moment.

ACSUG's scope of operation includes all the universities integrated in the SUG and the centres that teach university courses in Galicia in line with foreign educational systems, under the terms established in article 86 of the Spanish Law 6/2011 of 21 December of the LOU.

The promotion and quality assurance of the SUG constitutes the primary purpose of ACSUG. Its objectives are in line with article 31.1 of the LOU and article 69 of the Law 6/2013 of 13 June on the LSUG. ACSUG's main functions are to:

- Promote, in terms of quality, coordination among Galician universities and between these and other institutions;
- Assess the quality of institutions, centres and education leading to official and own degrees offered by universities and higher education institutions;
- Assess the quality of SUG university professors as well as the design of policies that imply the improvement of their activity;
- Assess the quality of research carried out in the SUG;
- Conduct studies and analysis on Labour market insertion for SUG university graduates;
- Issue quality assessment reports addressed to universities, educational administration, social partners and society in general.

ACSUG'S GOVERNANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

ACSUG is an autonomous consortium with its own legal personality and acts independent from its members to fulfil its objectives. The agency is governed by its own statutes and, as specified in their statutes, specific regulations of its bodies in line with the provisions of the LSUG and the legal regime of the public sector and public law, which includes administrative contracting activities. ACSUG's organisational structure comprises governing and management bodies, an evaluation body and an advisory body. The composition and roles of these bodies are defined in the new ACSUG statutes which were adopted in January 2018. The organisational structure of the staff, governance and management can be found on [ACSUG's website](#).

The **President** (Presidente) is the president of the Board of Directors and the highest institutional representative. The holder of the Presidency is appointed by the Council of the Xunta de Galicia from among people of recognized prestige in the university field. The president is, among other things, responsible for convening and presiding the sessions of the Board of Directors, ensuring the achievement of ACSUG's objectives and compliance with its statutes, supervising the activities of the consortium and submitting to the Board of Directors any documentation and reports it deems relevant.

The **Governing Board** (Consejo Rector), both referred to as the Governing Board and Board of Directors in the SAR, is the highest governing and management body of the agency. Its functions include: the approval of the annual programme of ACSUG activities, the approval of the annual preliminary budget, to monitor, supervise and control at the highest level the actions of the entity and the performance of the person in charge of management, and adopt appropriate measures for the best organisation and functioning of the ACSUG.

The Governing Board must include: the president of ACSUG; representatives of the Government of Galicia; representatives of the academic; representatives of the universities of the SUG; outstanding members of the academic and scientific and business community; students of the SUG; the president of the CGIACA; and the director of ACSUG. One of ACSUG's public employees, appointed by the Governing Board, serves as the secretary of the board. The secretary attends the meetings and may speak but not vote.

The **Director** is the executive manager of ACSUG. He or she directs, organizes, manages and inspects ACSUG's activities in accordance with Governing Board guidelines. The ACSUG Director is appointed by decree of the Council of the Xunta de Galicia at the proposal of the holder of the Regional Ministry appointed to the consortium, after hearing the Governing Board and according to criteria of competence, professionalism and experience, in the academic and scientific worlds.

The **CGIACA** (Comisión Galega de Informes, Avaliación, Certificación e Acreditación, Galician Committee for Reports, Assessment, Certification and Accreditation) is ACSUG's highest evaluation body. It executes evaluations, certifications and accreditations and other similar functions within the scope of university quality assurance attributed to ACSUG, which may be entrusted to it by the Governing Board or by the applicable regulations. The CGIACA acts independently and takes final decisions regarding the functions assigned to it, with the ultimate responsibility (art. 25.1 of the statutes of ACSUG). When exercising their functions, the members of the CGIACA act in their personal capacity ensuring at all times that there are no conflicts of interest and that they remain subject to the regulations in force regarding incompatibilities (art. 23.4 of the statutes of ACSUG).

The composition of the CGIACA must be published in the Official Gazette of Galicia and consists of the following members:

- The president of the CGIACA is appointed by the Minister of the Autonomous Community appointed to the ACSUG, from amongst people of recognised prestige in the Galician university environment, at the proposal of the Governing Board.
- Eight members elected by the Governing Board, appointed by its president. Six members will be named from among outstanding members of the national or international academic and scientific community, one will be named from among outstanding members of the Galician professional or business communities, with acknowledged experience and career in matters of university evaluation, and another will be named from among the students of the universities of the SUG that are members of ACSUG.

The director of ACSUG and the secretary of the body may each speak but not vote. The secretary is one of ACSUG's employees and appointed by the CGIACA.

In order to assist in the exercise of its functions, the CGIACA may decide to set up committees made up of expert advisers. The CGIACA determines the composition of these committees, their operating arrangements, and the requirements and procedure for appointing their members.

All CGIACA operating regulations, evaluation reports, certification and accreditations procedures and protocols as well as requirements and appointment procedure of the expert advisory committees are published on the ACSUG website.

The **Advisory Council** (Consejo Asesor) is the advisory body of ACSUG and conducts analysis and reflections on the functioning and activities carried out by ACSUG. Its functions include reporting on the procedures and actions developed by ACSUG and analysing the methodology and evaluation strategies that might be applied. The Council may propose measures to improve the quality of working methods and introduce, technological innovations; furthermore, it will issue reports on disputes that may be applied with respect to compliance with standards or codes of ethics and good practice in the procedures and actions carried out by ACSUG. The Advisory Council has the following composition:

- The president, who is named by the Regional Ministry, from among the members of the Advisory Council.

- Between six and ten members, chosen by the Governing Board, from among renowned personalities from the scientific, academic and professional field, both national (3) and international (4), representatives of the Galician business sector (2) and students of the SUG universities that are members of ACSUG (1).

The ACSUG director and one of ACSUG's public employees who serves as the body's secretary may each speak but not vote.

The **ACSUG staff** supports this organisational structure and is distributed in the following units under the Director:

- The Cabinet of Direction or **Executive Commission** (Gabinete de Dirección), which is primarily responsible for external relations, supporting committees of expert evaluators and continuous monitoring and improvement of the internal quality of the ACSUG.
- The **Programmes Unit** (Unidad de Programmes), which mainly deals with the processes of ex-ante accreditation, monitoring, modification and ex-post accreditation of official degrees, the evaluation of the design and certification of the implementation of internal quality assurance procedures of the centres, the evaluation of centres outside the Spanish University System, the development of the university professor evaluation programme (DOCENTIA Programme) and Labour market insertion studies for SUG university graduates.
- The **Teaching Staff Unit** (Unidad de Profesorado), which is, amongst other things, responsible for managing calls for evaluation and reporting prior to the recruitment of university professors, evaluation for the allocation of additional remuneration linked to the individual merits of professors and hired doctors, analysing and monitoring the R&D + I capabilities associated with the university field and other evaluation functions of university professors and research groups entrusted to the ACSUG by agreement.
- The **Management Unit** (Unidad de Gestión), which includes the departments responsible for supporting the rest of the units and the general services necessary for the proper performance of the tasks entrusted to the ACSUG.

ACSUG'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

ACSUG's key task is to promote and assure the quality in the Galician University System (SUG). ACSUG has requested this review in order to apply for the renewal of its membership of ENQA and EQAR. This review will focus on ACSUG's activities within the scope of the ESG as specified in the terms of references (Annex 2).

All assessment, accreditation and evaluation activities within the ESG include an initial self-assessment phase by the applicant, an external evaluation by a committee of experts, a preliminary outcome or interim report on which the applicants can comment, and a final report followed by cyclical follow up procedures.

ACSUG is considering including institutional monitoring and the evaluation of arts degrees in its regular external QA activities.

Activities at programme level

The assessment cycle of Galician degrees undergoes an external evaluation process conducted by ACSUG in line with their Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate Degree Evaluation Procedure (2016), consisting of the following processes:

- **Ex-ante accreditation** or validation of a degree programme before its implementation, if passed it means the university may offer the programme and it will lead to an official qualification;
- **Monitoring** of the implementation of degrees;
- **Modifications** to study programmes made as a result of the monitoring process;
- **Ex-post accreditation** of degrees, a cyclical procedure in order to maintain a status of an official study programme (4 years for master degrees and 6 years for bachelor degrees and doctorate programmes).

Ex-ante accreditation

Before universities in Spain may implement a new degree programme, they need a positive verification by a Spanish agency that is a member of ENQA and registered in EQAR. ACSUG has, since the Royal Decree 1393/2007 and the amendment by Royal Decree 861/2010, full competence to carry out the ex-ante accreditation of degrees in Galicia. After the degree is verified, the Autonomous Community of Galicia must authorise its implementation in accordance with the programming criteria it establishes and the availability of funding. Authorised degrees are entered in the Register of Universities, Centres and Titles (RUCT) of the Ministry responsible for universities.

ACSUG evaluates the proposed study plans before implementation to ensure consistency and coherence between the competencies and the contents proposed in the curricula and adequate human and material resources. The offer of degrees in the SUG is jointly planned to respond to the social and economic demands in its environment.

The agency's corresponding committee, the Study Programmes Evaluation Committee (Comisión de Evaluación de Rama) which is organised by field (Social Sciences and Law, Arts and Humanities, Sciences, Health Sciences, and Engineering and Architecture) conducts the evaluation of the degree proposal submitted by the University. This is a desk-based review and the corresponding Committee issues an ex-ante accreditation report regarding the fulfilment of the legal requirements and criteria and includes if applicable recommendations to be analysed during the follow-up procedure.

Follow-up (monitoring)

Quality assurance agencies are by law required to monitor the compliance of verified programmes. The monitoring process covers the period from the implementation of the degree until the evaluation of the ex-post accreditation. The main responsibility for follow-up in between two accreditation rounds is assigned to the university, with ACSUG monitoring the compliance with the project laid down in the validated study plans.

In this process, the public information that each university presents about its degrees is analysed, the degree of compliance with the established project and the results obtained are assessed. Good practices, possible deviations and decision-making processes are also detected, and actions carried out in response to the recommendations contained in the final report of ex-ante accreditation.

ACSUG performs at least one evaluation of the monitoring of each degree within the period between its implementation and the time when it has to undergo the evaluation to renew its ex-post accreditation; this evaluation of ACSUG usually coincides with the middle of the cycle of the degree. The monitoring process may take place more often if significant deviations were detected in previous monitoring which could pose a risk to the required minimum quality of the degree, or at the express request of the university itself, upon agreement with ACSUG. This is a desk-based review taking into account the same criteria as in the ex-post accreditation procedure.

Review of changes in official programmes (modification)

Universities may make changes to their degrees as a result of the monitoring process. Minor changes may be introduced autonomously but substantial modifications involving alterations in the structure, nature and objectives of the degree, must undergo a new ex-ante accreditation process. This is a desk-based review by the Study Programmes Evaluation Committee (SEC), taking into account the criteria in the ex-ante accreditation.

Ex-post accreditation

This ex-post accreditation procedure, which started in 2014, is needed for renewal of accreditation. It aims to verify that the official study programmes are delivering the curriculum in accordance with the initial proposal in ex-ante accreditation. This assessment includes a site visit and is carried out every four years for master's degrees and every six for undergraduate and doctorate degrees.

Joint programme accreditation

The assessment cycle described above includes all types of programme evaluation, including joint degree programmes. The agency also refers to joint programmes as inter-university degrees ('interuniversitarios').

The agency's guidelines for programme evaluation state that the follow-up and renewal of the accreditation is to be carried out by the evaluation agency designated by the Autonomous Community in which the university responsible for the programme is located, i.e. the university that requested ex-ante accreditation of the degree. This does not need to be the coordinating university, but all universities involved have to be notified about the evaluation processes by the responsible university.

Evaluations of artistic study programmes

The agency is considering including the ex-ante accreditation and evaluation of arts degrees in its external QA activities. The programmes in the field of the Arts in Spain are regulated separately. The evaluation would encompass an evaluation process as described above.

Activities at institutional level

DOCENTIA

The overall aim of the national DOCENTIA programme was set up in 2007 to support Spanish universities in designing their own mechanism to evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and boost the staff's development and recognition. Universities design and implement their own procedures for appraising the performance of teaching and research staff, and training and motivation programmes to ensure their teaching qualifications and skills.

The three Galician universities participated in this programme and obtained a favourable assessment for their evaluation procedures in 2007 (the verification, a desk-based review of the model proposed by the institutions), after which they initiated the implementation phase. The universities are in different stages of implementation:

- The University of A Coruña made the seventh call for implementation in 2018 and evaluated about 50% of its teaching staff (a desk-based review of the implementation phase). It is

expected that in 2019 it will certify its evaluation procedure; the certification includes a site visit to the institution.

- The University of Santiago de Compostela made its last call for implementation in 2014. Changes in the governing bodies of the university slowed the development of the programme and it is expected that in 2019 it will resume again with the design of a new evaluation procedure more adapted to the reality of the university at the moment.
- The University of Vigo designed a new evaluation procedure in 2015 that was verified in 2016. In 2017 it developed a new call for implementation (a desk-based review).
- A centre of the University of Vigo, the *Centro Universitario de la Defensa (CUD)*, developed its own teaching evaluation manual, in accordance with the DOCENTIA guidelines. This procedure was verified in 2017.

FIDES-AUDIT

ACSUG integrates two programmes to guide centres in the integration of activities related to quality assurance in teaching and the design and implementations of quality assurance in centres, the FIDES and AUDIT programmes. The FIDES Programme aims to guide centres (faculties or schools) in the integration of activities related to teaching quality assurance and to promote future processes of ex-ante accreditation, modification, monitoring and ex-post accreditation of official degrees. This programme is voluntary and was introduced in the SUG in 2007. The programme aims to support the centres in the design and implementation of a quality assurance procedures.

In the same period the AUDIT Program, developed jointly by ACSUG, ANECA and AQU Catalunya, was presented to the universities of the Spanish University System with the aim of supporting the initiatives of universities to guarantee the quality of their educational offer and promote a culture of continuous improvement, providing schools with the guidelines necessary for the design of Quality Assurance Systems (QAS).

Due to the complementarity of the two programmes, ACSUG operates a joint and coordinated single programme called the “FIDES-AUDIT Programme”. Currently two newly created centres, one of the UDC and the other of the UVI, are having their QAS designs evaluated.

ACSUG publishes an annual call for the Certification of the Implementation of the Quality Assurance Systems in the centres of the three SUG universities. A total of 33 centres of the different universities have QAS implementation certification and 4 are in the process of evaluation. This accounts for 37% of the total university centres in Galicia. In Spain as a whole, only 5% of the centres have certified QAS implementation in 2017.

Accreditation of centres

Royal Decree 420/2015, of 29 May 2015, introduces the institutional accreditation of public and private university centres as an alternative to the current model of ex-post accreditation of official university degrees. The requirements to be able to apply for institutional accreditation of centres (faculties or schools, not whole universities) are detailed in Resolution of March 7, 2018, of the General Secretariat of Universities. The first is for centres that have obtained renewed ex-post accreditation for at least half of the bachelor and master degrees that are taught. The second requirement for the centre is to have an above-mentioned certification of implementation of its QAS.

The institutional accreditation aims to simplify the process of renewing ex-post accreditation of official degrees and represents a form of public recognition of the maturity achieved in the implementation, through the FIDES-AUDIT programme, of quality assurance systems by universities and SUG centres.

ACSUG approved the Procedure for institutional accreditation of SUG university centres in June 2018 and appointed the Evaluation Commission for Institutional Accreditation to carry out this process. The commission has passed a favourable certificate of institutional accreditation to 24 SUG centres: 5 centres at the University of Santiago de Compostela, 12 centres at the University of Vigo and 7 centres at the University of A Coruña. This certificate allows each centre to automatically certify all official degrees taught by it over a period of five years.

Among the 82 universities in Spain, only 10 meet the two requirements indicated above to carry out the institutional accreditation of centres. Three out of 10 universities are in Galicia (UDC, USC and UVI). This is a reflection of the commitment of the Galician government, ACSUG and the Galician universities to improving quality.

Institutional monitoring

ACSUG will launch a pilot programme of institutional monitoring in 2019. This process will enable centres to monitor their degrees jointly by centre rather than having to issue an individual report for each degree. Only accredited centres will undergo this process. The processes used will be similar to the programme evaluation processes as earlier described in this report. The aim is to simplify the evaluation procedures and administrative burden, and to take advantage of the information that the centres are already generating by having an internal quality assurance system in place.

International activities within the scope of the ESG

ACSUG's membership in ENQA and EQAR means that it is frequently consulted by foreign universities, mainly in Latin America, to initiate collaborative activities and external evaluations in quality assurance.

Ex-post accreditation and monitoring outside Spain

In the period from 2014 to 2018 ACSUG has completed 16 ex-post accreditations and 9 follow-up reviews (monitoring) in three different universities. Nine more ex-post accreditations at two different evaluations will be completed in 2019. ACSUG does not conduct international ex-ante accreditations. Participating universities are the University of San Martín de Porres (USMP, Peru), the Néstor Cáceres Velásquez Andean University (UANCV, Peru), the Anahuac Xalapa University (UAX, Mexico) and the Anahuac Cancún University (UAC, Mexico).

The evaluations use the same process and criteria as for the ex-post accreditations carried out for the SUG. The processes are based on the "Guide for the evaluation of university bachelor's and master's degrees outside the Spanish University System (SUE)" from 2013, which is based on the ESG 2005. ACSUG has adopted a new guide in April 2018 which is based on the 2015 ESG, but the evaluation processes in the above-mentioned universities had already been initiated before adopting the new guidelines.

A new framework agreement was signed in October 2018 with Federico Henríquez and Carvajal University (UFHEC) in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, to begin the process of accreditation of their degrees. A more specific agreement on the degree subjects is pending confirmation.

In December 2018 ACSUG was authorised as an accreditation agency for university degrees for a five-year period by SINEACE, the national agency for evaluation, accreditation, and certification of quality in education in Peru. The process, based on the new "Guide for the evaluation of university bachelor's and master's degrees outside the Spanish University System (SUE)", is as follows:

1. The university contacts ACSUG's international relations coordinator.
2. A framework agreement is signed by ACSUG and the university.
3. Subsequently, the university requests specific activities to be performed, which are analysed by the ACSUG Advisory Council and, if appropriate, are confirmed in specific agreements. The university is aware of ACSUG's external evaluation guides, which will be used throughout the process.
4. Implementation of the evaluation procedure, always based on the guidelines established for this purpose by ACSUG, which includes, in general, the following:
 - a. Self-assessment by the university.
 - b. Analysis of the self-assessment report by the external commission appointed by ACSUG.
 - c. Preparation of the external visit to the university.
 - d. Conduct of the external visit to the university by the commission.
 - e. Issue by ACSUG of the interim assessment report.
 - f. Period of claims for the university.
 - g. Issue by ACSUG of the final evaluation report.
 - h. Period of appeal by the university against the final decision of ACSUG.
 - i. In the event of a positive report, ACSUG will monitor the improvement plans proposed by the university during the period of validity of the certificate. As a general rule, the monitoring does not include a site visit. Optionally, a site visit could be conducted in the third year of monitoring, either at the request of the university itself or depending on the development of the improvement plans.
 - j. Renewal of the accreditation every 5 years, including always a site visit to the university.

Activities outside the scope of the ESG

The agency carries out several additional activities in the SUG outside the scope of the ESG.

Assessment of academic staff

Quality assurance agencies in Spain are actively involved in the evaluation of individual academic staff members. According to the LOU, the goal of evaluations is the improvement of university professors, the quality of teaching and research. ACSUG has competence to do so in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, as established by the Law 6/2013 of 13 June on the Galician University System (LSUG). Various external evaluation mechanisms are introduced, in order to assess teachers' activity in different phases and aspects of their professional career.

- **Accreditation of faculty members** is a requirement for teaching and research personnel to be eligible for positions at universities in the autonomous community of Galicia. It ensures a minimum of standards and competencies, criteria depend on the phase of the professional career (e.g. assistant doctorate professor, doctorate professor). For the evaluation ACSUG relies on the CGIACA for the final decision and selection of an expert panel according to the relevant discipline. This is a desk-based review.
- **Faculty supplements** (bonuses for teaching, research and management activities) are economic incentives to stimulate excellent in teaching and research since 2006. Active university professors can apply in response to a call for a desk-based evaluation of their activities over a five-year period for teaching, or a six-year period for research. Candidates select up to 12 relevant criteria on which they choose to be evaluated. The process aims to encourage university professors to reflect on their practices.

Research evaluation activities

ACSUG engages in two additional types of research evaluation activities. The first aims to evaluate the different research groups, post-doctorate fellows, research projects, national networks of research groups, etc., which by law are not within the activities entrusted to it. Applications come from various projects and research groups including the Regional Ministry of Education and the Galician Ministry for Presidency and Industry.

Additionally, ACSUG has been participating also in the Programme for Support at the Post-Doctoral Stage, which falls under the “Management of Talent” in the Galician Plan for Research, Innovation and Growth (the 12C Plan). The aim of this programme is to increase the incorporation of research staff in the Galician R & D and innovation system, encouraging international mobility in its initial stage to improve their training and enable their return to the Galician University System (SUG). Since 2014, ACSUG has collaborated in the assessment of more than 1,000 applications in this activity.

Labour market insertion studies

ACSUG has been carrying out labour market insertion studies periodically since the creation of ACSUG in 2001. The main objective is providing information about the graduate population in the SUG to university institutions, different stakeholders and society in general.

The studies analyse the key indicators of the insertion of the graduate population into the Labour market in relation to the university education received for cohorts of bachelor’s and master’s graduates. Examples of indicators are: the rate of job insertion, the most used job search routes and their efficiency, the most valued factors for obtaining a job, the working conditions of their current work and the skills, knowledge and capabilities necessary for the development of their work; and in the analysis of the academic field: the performance of internships during studies and the degree of satisfaction with the university studies carried out. The use of similar questionnaires and methodology in each year allows the comparability of results, thus allowing analysis of the evolution of the results obtained and identification of trends over the years.

ACSUG recently published a labour insertion study regarding of cohorts of graduates between the academic years 2009-2010 and 2013-2014. In the five academic years analysed, the graduate population in the SUG was 43,115 individuals, of which 24,410 records were analysed.

INTERNATIONAL CONSULTING ACTIVITIES

National and European cooperation

On a national level ACSUG is a member of to the Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies (REACU) and the University Regulatory Commission for Monitoring and Accreditation (CURSA, Comisión Universitaria Reguladora del Monitoring y la Accreditation). REACU is a network which includes all the existing university evaluation agencies in Spain and addresses common topics relevant to the agencies. CURSA is the commission that carries out fundamental work in design and establishment of evaluation methodologies for official university degrees.

ACSUG is actively involved in several organisations on a European level: ENQA, EQAR and ECA (European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education).

Since 2014, the agency has contributed to several studies and participated in conferences and trainings organised by ENQA. In addition, the agency has participated in three ENQA working groups:

the IQA-Group (2008-2015) on practices in the field of management systems and internal quality; the working group on the impact of quality assurance (2012-2016) which aimed to analyse effects of implementation of quality assurance processes in higher education in Europe; and the working group on the involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance procedures (2012-2016).

The agency has been registered in EQAR since 2010 and plans to request to renew this registration. ACSUG is currently participating in the DEQAR project (Database of External Quality Assurance Results) which aims to develop a large database that facilitates the access to the reports of various university evaluation processes carried out by quality assurance agencies that are registered with EQAR.

ECA is an association of recognised accreditation and quality assurance agencies in Europe. ACSUG regularly attends conferences and seminars organised by ECA and organised ECA's annual meeting in Santiago de Compostela in 2016. Representatives of the agency are active in two working groups set up by ECA, the Mutual recognition and joint programmes and the Innovation in QA and Accreditation working group. One of the ACSUG technicians was part of the ECA Board from 2016 to 2018.

ACSUG has also actively participated in the TEMPUS IV project "Modernisation and Development of Curricula on Pedagogy and Educational Management in the Central Asian Countries (EDUCA)", coordinated by the Otto-Von-Guericke University of Magdeburg (OVGU). It is a European Union Programme to Promote Higher Education and Development aimed at sharing information and experiences between countries within and outside the European Union.

Consulting in Latin-America

As well as conducting external quality assurance evaluations in Latin America, ACSUG is also active in consulting and cooperation activities in Peru, Mexico, Chile and the Dominican Republic. These activities fall outside the scope of the review as defined in the Terms of Reference and, therefore, are not considered as activities which are externally assessed against the ESG.

ACSUG's activities include organising training seminars on quality assurance evaluations on request of universities and a framework collaboration agreement with the Chilean quality agency *AccreditAcción* to promote areas of quality assessment, certification and accreditation.

In the Dominican Republic ACSUG collaborates with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic to improve the quality of higher education by assisting in the structural reform of undergraduate studies. ACSUG also has an agreement with ISFODOSU, a higher education institution in the Dominican Republic.

ACSUG'S FUNDING

The operations of ACSUG are largely funded by the Government of the Autonomous Community of Galicia. Since 2011 the financing of the ACSUG has been included in the funding plans of the Galician University system. This plan allocates funding for 5 years and allows ACSUG to plan their activities on a multi-year basis.

The amount allocated to ACSUG was 1,200,000 euros in 2011 and has increased to 1,251,625 euros budgeted for 2019 despite of the economic crisis that Spain and the Government of the Autonomous Community of Galicia has suffered.

In addition to their basic funding, ACSUG obtains other income through evaluation activities in Latin-America. ACSUG does not obtain profit from these activities, as the collected fees simply cover the costs related to the activities carried out.

ACSUG had an operating surplus of 396,697.44 euros at the end of 2017. This was partially due to the fact that the agency has been unable to fill three vacancies in the agency.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ACSUG 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.

The 2014 review recommendation

(ENQA membership criterion 4 / 2005 ESG 3.5):

- ACSUG should update its Mission Statement to take account of the Guidelines that accompany ENQA Criterion 4/ESG 3.5 and publish the updated Mission Statement, setting out the division of labour and responsibilities between itself and the Universities and explaining how its Mission is translated into a clear policy and management plan via its Strategic Plan.

(ENQA membership criterion 1 / 2005 ESG 3.1):

- ACSUG should consider how it might initiate a conversation with the quality Agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA, in order to explore whether and how to devolve more of the operational aspects of those responsibilities to the Universities.

Evidence

External quality assurance is one of the main activities that ACSUG carries out in the Galician University System, these activities are described in detail in the agency's SAR. These activities are reflected in their Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and their updated mission statement *"...to promote and oversee guaranteeing the quality of the Galician University System (SUG), focusing on its continuous improvement and transferring relevant information to society at large about the activities carried out and their results, ensuring that the SUG is constantly adapted to the social and economic situation at any given moment"*.

The mission, vision, values, strategic plan and activities are all available on its website in Galician, Castellano and English. During the interviews, the panel found that all stakeholders are acquainted with the agency's activities. The panel also confirmed that stakeholders, particularly the universities and the Galician Government, are represented broadly in the various bodies and participate actively in the processes and decisions (page 12, ACSUG's governance and organisational structure). The strategic plan provides a broad overview of the agency's objectives and activities, but does not include any reference to structural aims or objectives regarding international evaluations and collaborations.

ACSUG's activities in the areas of higher education and external quality assurance are broken down into different programmes, whose aims and procedures are clearly explained on the website.

Programmes, described in the section on ACSUG's functions, activities and procedures of this report, are divided into two categories: mandatory assessment of study programmes (ex-ante and ex-post accreditation, modification and follow-ups) and voluntary institutional evaluations (FIDES-AUDIT for internal QA systems, institutional evaluation for accreditation of centres (faculties or schools), and DOCENTIA for assessing quality in teaching and learning). The panel found that the main activity in terms of time allocation of the agency is in processes related to formal and mandatory accreditation and follow-ups of universities' study programmes and internal quality assurance systems.

Interviews with the ACSUG leadership, staff and a sample of various acting committees and evaluators showed that the mandatory activities are undertaken on a regular basis following periodicities marked by law and perceived by the higher education institutions as necessary. Mandatory evaluations are clearly distinguished from other voluntary activities. Elective activities have in contrast two main purposes: facilitate and speed-up processes linked to mandatory assessments and enhance universities' quality at various levels.

During the interviews with representatives of universities and other stakeholders, the panel confirmed that both types of ACSUG activities are well known and perceived as helpful as tools for improvement. Representatives of institutions are well aware which of ACSUG's activities are mandatory by law and which are voluntary with the aim of further improvement. The difference between the two is clearly conveyed through information on ACSUG's website and informal communication with agency staff. Furthermore, the panel found high appreciation and satisfaction amongst representatives of institutions concerning the supervision and development of quality assurance system and culture in institutions by ACSUG.

In addition, ACSUG carries out international assessment activities, mostly in Latin-American countries, on the request of universities. These activities are well developed in the fields of internal quality systems and accreditation of study programs, where ACSUG applies the ESGs whenever possible within the local higher education law and framework. The panel observed during the interviews that this activity is highly appreciated by the universities involved, although represent only a minor part of the ACSUG work.

During the visit, the panel raised the issue of the role of ACSUG in fostering a stronger quality culture in universities so that the universities could take further responsibility in their internal quality assurance. Most stakeholders, including the rectors, academic staff and members of Social Councils, expressed that they happily relied on the supervision and development of quality assurance by ACSUG, and the quality culture ACSUG supports the institutions to develop

Stakeholders are included in the operations of the agency by representation in governing bodies and committees, as described in the section of ACSUG's governing and organisation structure of this report. Additionally, ACSUG surveys all those involved after each evaluation process and annual meta-evaluations with evaluation committees (including students, professionals, national and international academics), representatives of the Galician universities and representatives of universities.

The panel confirmed some committees included persons external to the Galician University System. Notably, experts in panels and persons in ACSUG bodies come mostly from Galicia and other Spanish Autonomous Regions. International experts were scarce and limited to the Advisory Council. The panel was told that Portuguese experts will be included in other bodies in the near future.

Analysis

Based on the evidence from the SAR and interviews mentioned above it is clear that the external quality assurance activities of ACSUG are taking place on a regular basis and that its mission is reflected in the agency's daily work. The sample of representatives of universities and relevant stakeholders in the Galician University System showed high awareness and appreciation of the scope and quality of the agency's activities.

With the exception of the Advisory Council, permanent bodies in ACSUG do not include people from outside Spain. No clear reason could be identified not to include more international experts in permanent bodies of the agency. The panel found that the aim of promoting a stronger quality culture in the institutions is reflected in the ACSUG staff and governing bodies, although the evidence for a strong support of this is not clearly reflected in the Strategic Plan. However, in line with the 2014 review, the panel does not find clear evidence of whether and how ACSUG aims to devolve more of the operational aspects of responsibilities to the universities.

ACSUGs international activities in the field of quality assurance are well developed and highly appreciated by universities involved. Even though the international activities represent a minor part of ACSUG's work, it could be valuable to develop an explicit strategy in these activities and vision on which projects to engage in.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the strong influence of ACSUG activities across the SUG, recognised by all the stakeholders as seminal for ensuring quality in universities.
- The international activities of the Agency are very valuable and much appreciated by the foreign universities involved.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests ACSUG might consider taking actions to stimulate universities to take a whole-of-institution perspective on quality assurance, devising appropriate methods for external evaluation of the effectiveness of implementation of such a perspective.
- The panel suggests including a strategy for all activities of ACSUG in the Strategic Plan, also the international evaluations and collaborations.

Panel conclusion: fully 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

ACSUG has an established legal basis, in compliance with the Spanish Organic Law 6/2001, of 21 December on Universities, modified by Organic Law 4/2007, of 12 April (LOU). With the enactment of The Law 6/2013, of the Galician Parliament, of 13 June, on the Galician University System (LSUG)

ACSUG is recognized as the body responsible for quality assurance matters within the Galician System (as defined in that Law). The regulatory statutes of the ACSUG were approved by Decree 6/2018.

ACSUG's statutes declare that its basic purpose is the promotion and assurance of the quality of the University System of Galicia (SUG). ACSUG is recognised formally by the Autonomous Government of Galicia, which is the competent public authority. The statutes confirm that ACSUG functions within the legal form of a public entity, attached to the Regional Ministry that has authority over universities. But the agency is, as written in its statutes, endowed with its own legal personality, and with full capacity and independence for the purpose of fulfilling its objectives.

During the interviews with the different stakeholders, the panel confirmed that ACSUG status and role as the quality assurance agency in Galicia is well understood and well accepted. In particular, the HEIs recognised and accepted the outcomes of the evaluation processes that ACSUG undertakes. The evaluation outcomes have regulatory consequences for ex-ante and ex-post assessments and accreditation of study programs and for Academic staff accreditation.

Both in the SAR and during the interviews, the panel found out that, as part of its international evaluation activities, ACSUG carries out assessments in several Latin-American countries and it was recently authorized for 5 years by the Peruvian authority SINEACE (the National System of Evaluation, Accreditation and Certification of the Educational Quality of Peru) as an accreditation agency for university degrees in Peru.

Analysis

The abovementioned legislative basis and regulatory statutes for the operations of ACSUG were provided by a weblink in the SAR and were examined by the panel. Based on this evidence it is obvious that ACSUG has a clear legal basis and is clearly recognised by the relevant public authorities. In line with these findings, institutions have the security that outcomes of processes are accepted within their higher education system.

Functions of ACSUG are clearly defined in line with the two key legal documents (LSUG and LOU), including evaluation activities within the scope of the ESG such as external programme review (validation, modification and accreditation). The agency is allowed to perform any other functions within the scope of university quality. The panel found that the establishment of ACSUG's statutes in 2018 further strengthened the agency's position and the acceptance of their operations in the SUG by specifying their functions. Based on the SAR, weblinks and the interview with representatives of the agency's committees and external stakeholders, the statutes are well implemented, and evaluation processes are widely accepted within the SUG.

Following interviews with representatives of a Peruvian university, the panel concludes that ACSUG is recognised and accepted as an accreditation agency for university degrees in Peru for a 5-year period.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the development and implementation of the new statutes in 2018.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

The 2014 review recommendation

(ENQA membership criterion 5 / 2005 ESG 3.6):

- ACSUG should consider, as it moves to have its new Statutes enacted, whether one of the membership positions for the CGIACA should be reserved for a suitably qualified person from outside Galicia.

Evidence

ACSUG's statutes show that the agency is an autonomous consortium with its own legal person and full independence from its members (the Regional Government of Galicia and Universities) in order to achieve its objectives (point 1 of article 1 of the statutes, approved by Decree 6/2018 of 11 January). ACSUG is accountable to the Galician Ministry responsible for university matters but governed by their own statutes.

During the visit it was confirmed that ACSUG has 5-year financial agreements approved by the Government and the universities. The agency expressed its belief that such arrangement provides financial independence from shorter term political fluctuations. ACSUG can plan their budget independently but has problems in personnel recruitment due to the public servant status of employees. The Galician government must agree upon all new posts and appoint personnel according to a lengthy bureaucratic procedure.

ACSUG aims to ensure operational independence in its statutes by clearly differentiating the governing and executive bodies from the advisory and evaluation bodies. During the visit all the groups interviewed by the panel highlighted their firm belief in ACSUG's independence in its operations.

The governance structure of ACSUG is described in ACSUG's governance and organisational structure, p.12. During the visit, the panel confirmed that the Governing board, Advisory Council and CGIACA consist of a wide variety of stakeholders, including students, in accordance with the agency's statutes. The President of the Governing Board, the ACSUG Director and the president of the CGIACA are all appointed by the Galician Government. The Governing Board however proposes the CGIACA President to the government and elects the members for the CGIACA. The panel noticed that all CGIACA members are Galician and there are no concrete plans to change this. The agency had considered the recommendation in 2014 and concluded that the frequency of meetings (at least once a month) makes it difficult to include international representatives.

The CGIACA is responsible for the composition of the independent expert committees and panels (see section 2.4 Peer review of experts) and the final decisions on reports and outcomes of assessments. The CGIACA has full responsibility for all the evaluation reports and outcomes, with no interference from the Governing Board or the ACSUG Director. The criteria for evaluations are set jointly by the CGIACA and the Galician government. All stakeholders interviewed (representatives of universities, government, ACSUG bodies and a sample of experts) agreed that existing procedure guarantees fair, professional and independent evaluations.

Analysis

The organisational independence is demonstrated by the aforementioned Galician legislation and in the statutes of the agency. The panel recognised that the 5-year financial agreements with the Government and universities contribute to the agency's autonomy in their operations.

Although ACSUG can plan their budget independently, the agency has problems with recruiting personnel due to their reliance on the Galician government to initiate the procedure and appoint personnel according to a lengthy bureaucratic procedure. Based on the interviews the panel has confidence this procedure does not impact the independence of personnel recruitment, but it does limit the agency's possibility to take initiative to recruit permanent staff. ACSUG has the possibility to look into ways of covering personnel vacancies independent from the public administration on a temporary basis.

In order to safeguard its operational independence, the agency relies on internally developed procedures and makes a clear differentiation between the governing and executive bodies, and the evaluative body CGIACA. In addition, the agency has a diverse group of stakeholders and experts represented in the Governing Board, Advisory Council and evaluation committees as established in their statutes.

During the visit the panel noticed that the Galician government both appoints the President of the Governing Board and the Director of ACSUG. The Galician government is also represented in the Governing board which elects the members of the Advisory Council and CGIACA. Thus, all governing structures rely on appointments by the Government. But the panel found no evidence that the government steers processes within the agency. All appointed members in the agency are aware that they are participating in their individual capacity. Due to the important role of the government in the SUG, the panel sees the level of involvement by political authorities as legitimate balance which does not compromise the agency's operational independence.

The panel recognises that no interviewees raised any concern of ministerial influence on everyday proceedings and recognises the agency's effort to balance their operational independence in their regional context by their statutes and internal procedures. The panel recommends strengthening these efforts by setting public procedures based on open and widely publicized calls prioritising professional competence and prior experience, when the Government selects the President of the Agency and the Governing Board, the President of the CGIACA and the Director of the Agency. An additional way to enhance ACSUG's independence, as recommended in the 2014 review, might be to appoint non-Galician members in all the agency's governing and evaluations bodies. The panel encourages the agency to look into solutions to overcome the problems travel time may pose, such as including members who live close to Galicia or using telematic communications for meetings.

The panel also found that the CGIACA sets the criteria for evaluations jointly with the Galician government. The government has high trusts in the agency and CGIACA's expertise and does not appear to steer any processes or criteria except for that they should fit within the (national) legal framework. Following the analysis of the documents combined with the information gained from the interviews the panel concludes that the system is sound, accepted by all stakeholders, well balanced in power and does not jeopardise the independence of ACSUG. All stakeholders interviewed (universities, experts, Galician government and ACSUG bodies) agreed that the procedure guarantees a fair, professional and independent evaluation.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests setting procedures for the selection of the director of the agency, president of the Governing Board and president of the CGIACA based on professional competence and prior experience.
- The panel suggests putting procedures in place in order to cover personnel vacancies independent from the public administration on a temporary basis, until staff positions are created and filled through public procedures.
- The panel suggests appointing non-Galician members in all the agency's governing and evaluations bodies, this could be a way to further enhance ACSUGs' independence.

Panel conclusion: fully 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 mission statement of the agency indicates that *“ACSUG has the basic mission of promoting and assuring the quality of the University System of Galicia (SUG), focusing on its ongoing improvement and transmitting to society relevant information about the activities carried out and their results, so that the SUG is always adapted to the social and economic situation at all times”*. The agency thus aims to provide material for structured analysis regarding the SUG.

The SAR notes that ACSUG engages in a variety of activities to communicate information they gather to relevant stakeholders, all published on the agency's website. These activities include:

- Conducting and publishing employability studies with the main objective of providing information about the graduate population in the SUG to university institutions and different societal stakeholders.
- Contributions to the 'Report on the status of external quality assessment in Spanish universities', an annual report by ANECA on the status on quality assurance of Spanish universities. ACSUG contributes with data on quality assurance in Galicia.
- Yearly activity reports.
- Publication of the results of satisfaction questionnaires regarding assessment activities on their website.
- Reflections on, or conclusion of, information gathered during conferences and seminars.

The agency mentions several activities and publications in relation to thematic analysis in their SAR. The panel has reviewed those reports and publications in order to evaluate whether they comply with the aforementioned interpretation of thematic analyses.

ACSUG has thematic evaluation of the data they gather included in their strategic plan as objective 3.2, meta-evaluation. Although ACSUG gathers valuable information for meta-analysis, ACSUG acknowledges in the SAR and in meetings with the panel that its thematic analysis is limited and attributes the gap to lack of staff (see 3.5 Resources). This said, the panel did not find any concrete plans to conduct meta-analysis in the interviews with the ACSUG director, executive commission and other staff.

The SAR also notes thematic analysis as a particular concern of ACSUG and other quality assurance agencies in Spain. REACU has identified thematic analysis as a weakness among its members in general and has concrete plans at a national level to promote additional thematic analysis. ACSUG plans to participate in a REACU seminar concerning thematic analysis in the fall of 2019.

Analysis

One of the changes in the 2015 ESG in comparison with the previous version is that the actual purpose of this standard was made more specific and explicit. The purpose of this standard is to encourage agencies to use and disseminate findings of their external quality assurance activities through the analysis and publication of generic conclusions which result from the gathering of individual quality assurance procedures. The Guidelines indicate what is expected: *“In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts. A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.”* (ESG 2015, 3.4 Thematic analysis).

The panel acknowledges the value of the range of reports mentioned above, but does not consider these as thematic analysis as defined in the ESG:

- While the employability studies are research-type reports are useful for the SUG and published on the agency’s website, they do not constitute the thematic analysis for the purpose of compliance with ESG 3.4 which requires agencies to use and disseminate findings of their external quality assurance activities through the analysis and publication of generic conclusions which result from the gathering of individual quality assurance procedures.
- The aim of the annual ANECA-report is to provide information on the conduct and results by evaluation, certification and accreditation processes for quality assurance in university education and is aimed at the Ministry responsible for universities and various social agents. The report provides an extensive overview of the external quality assurance efforts which are made in Spain but does not present an analysis of the outcomes of the review procedures.
- The publication of yearly activity reports, results of satisfaction questionnaires regarding assessment activities and conclusions of information gathered during conferences and seminars do not fall under the scope of meta-analysis either.

The ACSUG staff acknowledge the deficiency in meta-analysis as a form of thematic analysis and attributes this gap to the lack of staff. During meetings the panel explored if it is possible to outsource the work of thematic analysis. The panel could not find any barriers to outsource this work and the agency has sufficient funds to do so.

The panel does not consider the abovementioned activities as fully answering the demand for thematic analysis as defined in the ESG but recognises the agency’s engagement in broader forms of

thematic analysis. The abovementioned analyses contribute to the improvement of the quality and quality assurance processes in the SUG and are used by stakeholders such as the government and higher education institutions (especially the employability studies) to reflect on the content and outcomes of the study programmes and plan for the needs of society.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that the agency develops their thematic analysis based on the data they gather in their external quality assurance activities, i.e. meta-analysis.
- The panel recommends that, pending the appointment of additional staff, the agency explore options for outsourcing the work on thematic analysis.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

The 2014 review recommendation

(ENQA membership criterion 3 / 2005 ESG 3.4):

- ACSUG should set out a five-year strategic plan and forecast budgets for presentation to its Board of Directors in order to plan its capacity to deliver its growing programme of external reviews.

Evidence

Human resources

ACSUG formally has a director, 11 technical and 5 administrative staff working full-time. Each post has a functional profile describing the duties, knowledge, skills and competence required to carry out the respective activities.

The SAR describes an annual training plan that aims to update and increase the knowledge and skills of the staff. During the visit the panel was presented with additional evidence of regular training for staff. The professionalism of the ACSUG staff was highly regarded and conveyed to the panel by multiple stakeholders (reviewers, universities, students, the advisory council and CGIACA) during the visit and by formal feedback documentation. Expert evaluators and assessors are also carefully selected and trained, this is discussed in more detail in the section ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts.

In the period between July 2017 and September 2018 three vacancies in the agency had opened, the three staff members lost in recent years have not been replaced for the moment due to wider difficulties with the appointment of public servants in the region, despite of ACSUG's efforts to start this process. Consequently, the full-time staff now consists of 13 instead of 16 people. The staff numbers are insufficient to carry out all the work to which the strategic plan aspires. There is a temporary redistribution of functions among the rest of the staff to make up for the absence of the three workers.

Financial resources

The SAR describes that operations of ACSUG are largely funded by the Government of the Autonomous Community of Galicia. Since 2011 the financing of the ACSUG has been included in the funding plans of the Galician University system. This plan allocates funding for five years and allows ACSUG to plan their activities on a multi-year basis. The multi-annual budget settlement referred to in the SAR was confirmed by the minister and other Governing Board members.

In line with the recommendations of the 2014 review, ACSUG has developed a five-year strategic plan which was approved by the Governing Board. During the visit the Governing Board confirmed that they approve the agency's budget during their meetings and that the agency is in their view sufficiently funded.

ACSUG obtains other income through evaluation activities in Latin-America. However, ACSUG does not obtain profit from these activities as the income covers only the costs related to the activities carried out.

Other resources

The agency has good and appropriate premises and plans to move to even better ones when a new building, which will also house other related agencies, will be completed.

Analysis

Human resources

Based on its meetings with staff, different stakeholders and formal feedback documentation, the panel is convinced that the agency has a stable and highly competent team of staff with deep knowledge of the Galician university system. The panel saw records of regular training sessions for staff, including English language training. However, the limited capacity of staff to work in English, commented on in previous ENQA reviews, remains an issue.

As mentioned above, ACSUG's staff numbers are insufficient to carry out the work in the strategic plan. The panel believes the agency could carry out all activities if ACSUG would be fully staffed and have the three vacancies filled. While the appointment of new staff members, public servants, is beyond the agency's control, the result is that ACSUG does not fully comply with this standard. Additionally, the panel noted limited experts from outside of Galicia in the agency's governing and evaluation bodies. Increasing the number of experts from outside Galicia could contribute to further advancing the agency's expertise.

Financial resources

ACSUG is relatively well resourced financially and this financing is comparatively secure. During the visit the panel confirmed that the recommendations from the 2014 review have been implemented by setting out a five-year strategic plan and presenting the budget to the Governing board on a bi-annual basis.

The panel recognises the multi-annual budget as essential for securing the sustainability of the agency's activities and as a good reflection on the fiscal commitment to the work of the agency.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the multi-annual budget settlement greatly contributes to the predictability of operations through the existence of good forward planning and sustainability of the agency's activities.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that the agency continues to work to solve the issues related to the vacancies with the ministry in order to ensure full staffing as soon as possible.
- The panel recommends that the agency uses its unused funds to creatively outsource some work, for example the translation of the ESG to Galician and thematic analysis.
- The panel recommends recruiting experts from outside of Galicia for all its governing and evaluation bodies.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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

The agency emphasises the importance of accountability in their SAR. This is translated in their core values as continuous improvement of the agency and external evaluation processes, responsibility towards their environment in all actions of the agency, and professionalism and quality of their staff.

ACSUG has implemented an internal quality and environmental management system since 2006 which is certified by the Spanish Association of Standardisation and Certification (AENOR) in ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) standards. The policy has been approved by the Governing Board and is periodically reviewed to check its sustainability. The Director is responsible for the application of the policy, and a Quality and Environment Supervisor has been appointed from the ACSUG staff to oversee the system.

The Quality and Environmental policy can be found on the ACSUG website. The policy covers ensuring the establishment of documented work processes and outcomes, compliance with laws and regulations, staff training aimed at improving performance of the management system, analysing information, the encouragement of sustainable use of natural resources and energy, maintaining a fluid system for communication with clients and stakeholder and feedback and satisfaction of services provided to reviewed entities. Interviews during the site visit confirmed that this policy is actively implemented. The agency does not use external contractors with exception of the occasional development and maintenance of its IT system.

Feedback systems range from surveys to informal contacts and include a wide range of stakeholders including members of evaluation committees, students, academics, researchers. Surveys for the reviewed entities and all members of evaluation committees take place after each evaluation process, including international evaluations. Stakeholders, including the Government of Galicia and different interest groups in universities, are invited to annual meetings for meta-evaluations of ACSUG's processes and activities. Results from feedback systems of the reviewed entities and stakeholder groups are evaluated and published on the website. ACSUG also uses internal surveys for their staff and bodies. The panel confirmed in several meetings that these systems are in place internally and externally, and suggestions or plans for improvement are followed up. For example by adapting ACSUG's IT system for evaluations to decrease the workload for institutions.

The panel noticed that, in addition to the formal feedback structure, there is frequent informal contact with international institutions that participate in evaluations. Reviewed entities report ACSUG staff is easy to contact, open to feedback and helpful offering support in any questions they have concerning quality assurance and evaluations.

The SAR mentions the new versions of the management system require carrying out an analysis of activities in which weaknesses and actions for improvement are identified. The panel received additional documentation on the internal quality assurances, context analysis and risk analysis during the visit. These documents contain elaborate information on risks, opportunities, actions and those who are responsible for the follow up. The panel had it confirmed that these documents are discussed in the Governing Board. These are internal documents and therefore not published on the ACSUG website.

The agency has no explicit policy to guard against intolerance or discrimination. During the visit, the CGIACA reported aiming to compose a balanced evaluation team, which includes gender balance. Evaluation teams also include best practices related to equal opportunity policies in their reports.

Analysis

The agency has a well-developed internal quality and environmental management system. Processes and procedures are clearly defined for all its activities, and it has structure in place for assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of its work. All review procedures are evaluated regularly involving all stakeholders, which the panel confirmed with the stakeholders during the visit. In addition, the staff and Governing Board have meta-evaluations of the outcomes at least once a year for continuous improvement of processes. This is reflected in the high praise for ACSUG staff and reviewers by universities.

The panel recognises the efforts by the agency to implement processes of international quality assurance and taking into account the ESG. Nevertheless, no explicit policy against intolerance, discrimination or for equal opportunity could be found. Although the agency staff and CGIACA recognise the importance of ensuring equal opportunities, including ensuring gender balance, they have no concrete plans to develop a policy in this area.

Reflecting on initial concerns on the agency's risk analysis due to the limited information in the SWOT of their SAR, the panel found elaborate written evidence of context and risk analysis in the agency's internal documents received during the visit. These documents showed a reflective and self-critical approach, combined with appropriate actions and follow-up. These documents gave valuable insight in ACSUG's context, development and objectives, and would be valuable to integrate with the SWOT analysis presented in ACSUG's SAR. The documents are discussed and analysed internally with ACSUG staff and the Governing Board.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends the agency to develop a policy for equal opportunity that also guards against intolerance or any kind of discrimination, which covers the agency and all its activities.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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

The Spanish legislation establishes that membership of ENQA and registration at EQAR is a condition to carry out degree evaluations in Galicia (Royal Decree 1393/2007, amended by Royal Decree 861/2010).

The review conducted in 2018-2019 is the third review of this type. ACSUG explains in the SAR that they commit to continuous improvement of quality of their activities and ensuring they continue to comply with the ESG by participating in an international evaluation process every 5 years. The agency shows this by the commitment of the management and staff during interviews and describing in their SAR in which way they made systematic adjustments considering their previous review and the updated ESG.

Additionally, ACSUG participates in two periodical audits. One annual audit of their Internal Management System in order to continuously update and improve its effectiveness. The second is an audit carried out by the Spanish Association for Standardisation and Certification (AENOR) for external certifications of the agency's quality and environmental management system.

Analysis

Spanish regulation requires registration under EQAR as a prerequisite to perform programme accreditations as a regional agency. Thus, in order for ACSUG to perform its functions in the SUG, they need to participate and pass in an external review every five years. This external motivation aside, the panel sees ACSUG is also intrinsically motivated to continuous improvement, compliance with the ESG and has taken steps to follow up on recommendations of previous reviews.

Panel conclusion: fully 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 1 of the ESG.

The 2014 review recommendation

(2005 ESG 2.1):

- ACSUG should consider how it might initiate a conversation with the quality Agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA, in order to explore whether and how to devolve more of the operational aspects of those responsibilities to the Universities.

Evidence

The agency aims, as they write in their SAR, to support institutions to meet internal quality assurance criteria by their evaluation and analysis activities. These criteria are aimed to support and improve the institutions' internal quality assurance processes.

Part 1: Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance	Activities of ACSUG within ESG							
	Programme level					Institutional level		
	Ex-ante accreditation of degrees	Modification of degrees	Monitoring of degrees	Ex-post accreditation of degrees	International Assessment	Institutional accreditation	FIDES-AUDIT	DOCENTIA
1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance	9	9	3	3	3	X	1	1
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	2, 5 & 8	2, 5 & 8	1	1	1	X	2	2
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	5 & 8	5 & 8	1 & 6	1 & 6	1 & 6	X	3	2
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	4	4	1.4 & 1.5.	1.4 & 1.5.	1.4 & 1.5.	X	3	NA
1.5 Teaching staff	6	6	4	4	4	X	4	1,2 & 3
1.6 Learning resources and student support	7	7	5	5	5	X	5	2
1.7 Information management	8 & 9	8 & 9	3 & 7	3 & 7	3 & 7	X	2	2
1.8 Public information	4	4	2	2	2	X	6	1 & 2
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	8 & 9	8 & 9	1 & 3	1 & 3	1 & 3	X	2	2
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	*1	*1	*2	*3	*4	*5	*6	*7

Table 1: Activities of ACSUG within the ESG in relation to the criteria of part 1. Sections of the protocols where each criterion is covered are shown. Retrieved from SAR p.43.

During the site visit the panel learned from the technical staff of ACSUG that they used the ESG Part 1 as a guideline to develop evaluations on programme and institutional level within the scope of the ESG. ACSUG uses a Spanish translation of the ESG to increase its use and visibility. The table 1 below shows how the protocols of ACSUG's activities relate to part 1 of the ESG.

The ESG Part 1 are also used to develop evaluation criteria for the internal quality assurance processes of international institutions. In fact, interviews with international institutions revealed the use of the ESG Part 1 as one of the main reasons why international institutions are interested in being evaluated by ACSUG.

The FIDES-AUDIT programme, which is developed by ACSUG in collaboration with other Spanish agencies, is specifically designed to assess the criteria in Part 1 of the ESG. The agency aims to support universities to implement effective quality assurance systems that generate relevant information on for example learning outcomes. This information will be used as the basis for periodic review of degrees and centres, as well as the pilot for institutional monitoring which will start in 2019. The SUG has 37% of their centres accredited whilst only 5% of centres are accredited in Spain.

Analysis

The panel studied a sample of the protocols and criteria from different activities of ACSUG and compared these to the ESG as mapped in the table. The panel sees clear evidence of the ESG Part 1 being used as a guideline for evaluations and concludes that ACSUG's criteria cover the ESG Part 1 standards 1.1 – 1.10. The panel noticed the 2015 ESG are not yet translated to Galician and encourages the agency to translate the standards to increase their visibility.

Especially international stakeholders are well aware of the Part 1 of the ESG and the way they are incorporated in the evaluation criteria. The panel commends ACSUG for its role in translating and applying the ESG to different contexts in Latin-America.

The panel recognises the hard and valuable work by the agency and stakeholders in the SUG, which is reflected in the high percentage of university centres being accredited through the FIDES-AUDIT. The maturity of the system could be further developed, as suggested in the 2014 review, by exploring whether and how ACSUG can devolve more of the operational aspects of responsibilities in quality assurance to universities.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends ACSUG for the strength of the system which is reflected in the wide-spread implementation of the FIDES-AUDIT programme.
- The panel commends ACSUG for its role in translating and applying the ESG to different contexts in Latin-America.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel encourages ACSUG to follow up on translating the ESG 2015 to Galician to increase their visibility.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

The 2014 review recommendations

(2005 ESG 2.2):

- As part of its move to adopt a more strategic approach to planning its activities ACSUG should consider how, when setting the aims and objectives for new external quality assurance processes, it could undertake consultations specifically linked to its proposals for changes to its review methods more widely across the Galician Universities and stakeholders rather than rely on undertaking consultations within existing meetings and before asking its Board of Directors to approve them.

(2005 ESG 2.4):

- ACSUG should continue to seek ways in which expert reviewers from outside Spain and other international experts can contribute to the Agency's reviews and its work more generally.
- ACSUG should consider, if appropriate in association with the quality agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA, how it might ensure the inclusion of an element of retrospective critical self-evaluation in submissions for each of the external review processes it operates, in order to encourage the exercise of critical self-reflection on the part of the subjects of its reviews.
- ACSUG should reflect carefully on the concerns expressed about the FIDES-AUDIT process in the 2009 Report and this report and seek to initiate a conversation with the quality agencies of the other Autonomous Communities and the National Agency, ANECA in order to consider jointly whether, in the interests of supporting the academic autonomy of the Universities, including the Galician Universities, greater responsibility for the development of internal quality assurance systems should be devolved to the Universities while the Agency retains responsibility for the quality assurance of the University's internal quality arrangements.

Evidence

The framework for each external evaluation procedure within the Spanish higher education system is defined by law. Each regional agency has some room for adaptation to their local context. The technical staff of ACSUG prepares draft documents for each procedure in cooperation with other Spanish agencies through REACU. The design also takes into account relevant international, national and Galician regulations. Evaluation guides and procedures regarding programme evaluation include the accreditation of joint degrees, for which the agency added some specific criteria. The first specifies the university as responsible for evaluation processes (accreditation, follow-up and renewal of accreditation). The other criterion aims to ensure adequate coordination of the inter-university programmes in learning processes and outcomes, for example the “functioning of the coordination mechanisms between the universities that offer the programme”.

The proposals are discussed in the Governing Board, which includes representatives of the Galician government, SUG universities, academics, students and the labour market. The panel confirmed that the procedures are approved by the CGIACA and published on the agency's website.

As described in the SAR, the agency works on continuous improvement and conducts regular meta-evaluation of its evaluation processes, including analysis of satisfaction surveys, planning, calls, protocols and guidelines. Surveys and internal meta-evaluations aside, the agency organises regular meta-evaluation meetings with representatives of Galician universities since 2014, usually twice a year. During these meetings protocols and guidelines are evaluated and, if necessary, suggestions for adaptation can be made. Most adaptations are aimed at optimising the evaluation processes for universities by reducing their workload where possible within the framework of the law.

During interviews representatives of universities and faculty expressed satisfaction with the processes. They feel the processes contribute to continuous improvement of centres, programmes and faculty development in the DOCENTIA programme. The outcomes are clear and useful for follow-up. Stakeholders reported that the workload of evaluation procedures can be high, especially when engaging in a procedure for the first time, but pointed out that this is for the most part due to national regulations. In general, they saw that the workload is balanced and felt that the agency avoids overlap between evaluation processes and aims to reduce the workload whenever they can within the context of the national regulations. Examples of simplification processes where overlap between processes is avoided are the joint ex-post accreditation of titles, FIDES-AUDIT and DOCENTIA programme.

Analysis

The panel welcomes the adjustment since the 2014 review with regular meta-evaluation meetings of evaluation processes with universities. The panel is convinced that these meetings contribute to the improvement of the quality of processes and the acceptance of the evaluations by stakeholders.

Stakeholders are highly satisfied with the agency's information, support, protocols and follow-up processes. The panel found a high degree of acceptance of the agency's processes in the sector: they are well embedded (i.e. understood and accepted) by all stakeholders because of the clear communication by the ACSUG staff. Moreover, the panel recognises that different stakeholders appreciate the agency's effort to avoid overlap in procedures and to reduce bureaucracy. This can be seen in standards relating to internal quality assurance, which are no longer required to be evaluated at programme level when the programme is organised by a centre, faculty or school with the FIDES-AUDIT certification. Additionally, ACSUG's role in enhancing quality in the institutions has been highlighted by most external stakeholders.

Frameworks of evaluation procedures at the programme level are largely regulated by national regulations while voluntary procedures such as the FIDES-AUDIT and DOCENTIA programme are defined in collaboration with other Spanish agencies. The panel observes a strong focus on the development of all, regulated and voluntary, procedures and quantitative indicators in the external quality assurance system, as is common in the overall approach to quality assurance in the region and in Spain.

The panel hopes that a shift towards centre and institutional accreditation combined with the agency's intentions to support and further the development of quality culture in the universities, will contribute to an increasingly qualitative and reflective approach to quality assurance processes within institutions. It may help to increase the self-critical nature of self-evaluation reports in order to achieve this.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the introduction of the regular meta-evaluation of processes with stakeholders since 2014.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests that ACSUG could explore whether and how ACSUG can devolve more of the operational aspects of responsibilities in quality assurance to universities to advance their quality culture, and support universities to further develop qualitative and reflective approach to quality assurance processes.

Panel conclusion: fully 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

ACSUG outlines the procedures of all external evaluation processes in the scope of the ESG in their SAR and refers to their website for detailed guides on assessments of degrees (including joint degrees), centres and teaching staff. The guides include information on the process, indicators, documentation that is to be provided, a template for the report resulting from the external assessment, and where relevant, suggested schedules for the site visits.

Representatives of institutions and individual applicants in Galicia confirmed during interviews that the procedures are clear, transparent and carried out professionally. Representatives of institutions in international evaluations of degrees and institutions feel the same. The process is the same as far as possible, but they still use the 2005 ESG, due to the time when those agreements were made and the processes were started. The agency intends to use the 2015 ESG when starting future processes . The agency does not do ex-ante accreditation outside Spain.

All procedures include a self-assessment by the applicant, an external evaluation by a committee of evaluators including an academic, professional and student and a report resulting from the external assessment. ACSUG ensures the consistency of processes in several ways, which are specified under ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes. Institutions and applicants can make allegations or comment on ACSUG's interim report, which are taken into account by ACSUG prior to issuing the final report. After this there is the opportunity to appeal decisions in court. The evaluation activities are cyclical and include follow-up and monitoring procedures. All reports – including those related to international activities - are published online.

As described under ACSUG’s functions, activities, and procedures in this report, not all external assessments include a site visit. The verification stage or ex-ante accreditation, monitoring and modifications of degrees do not include a site visit. Neither do the design and initial implementation stage of the DOCENTIA programme. These are desk-based reviews, but can all of them be regarded as stages in a longer process towards a final procedure that includes a site visit.

A site visit is included in the certification stage of the DOCENTIA programme, as well as the other implementation stages of institutional and programme level activities. The activities of evaluations of implementation can be found in table 2. Site visits always include interviews with different stakeholders.

All evaluations are cyclical and include monitoring procedures. For example, degree programmes produce annual reports in which they report on their activities and progress on recommendations from previous reports and evaluations.

During the visit the panel found wide acceptance of the processes and its outcomes by all stakeholders. Representatives of Galician and international higher education institutions report the evaluation processes help them reflect on their activities and find the recommendations helpful in improving their programmes.

Activity		Self-evaluation stage	External visit	Provisional report	Allegations stage	Final report	Appeal stage	Follow-up
Programme level	Ex-ante accreditation	X		X	X	X	X	X
	Modification	X		X	X	X	X	X
	Monitoring	X		X	X	X	X	X
	Ex-post accreditation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	International evaluation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Institutional	FIDES-AUDIT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	DOCENTIA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Institutional accreditation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 2: Evaluation activities of ACSUG and their stages, p. 47 SAR ACSUG.

Analysis

On the basis of the evidence gathered, the panel finds the external quality assurance processes within the scope of the EGS to be reliable, consistent and pre-defined. Information about the processes is presented transparently, accessible online and known to relevant stakeholders.

Programme accreditation consists of different sub-processes that can be seen as one: verification, monitoring and ex-post accreditation. Self-assessment, site visit, follow-up and published report are

systematically included. Overall, the panel regards the external quality assurance framework as a comprehensive framework for external quality assurance at programme level.

As can be seen in the table, the ex-ante programme accreditation does not include a site visit. On an institutional or centre level, the agency carries out voluntary institutional accreditations, the DOCENTIA and FIDES-AUDIT programmes (see page 17). Site visits are not incorporated in the design processes and initial implementation of these institutional programmes. Site visits only take place after the reviewed entity has experience with the (degree) programme so a review panel can evaluate the way the approved programmes have been implemented. This approach was chosen because a site visit is most valuable once these programmes and its procedures are implemented. The panel considers the current approach to be in line with this standard because a site visit takes place for certification or accreditation of the programmes.

Finally, ACSUG's international evaluations are voluntary procedures with very similar processes as used in Galicia. They include a self-assessment, an external review including a site visit and a published report. ACSUG encourages evaluated programmes and institutions to participate in follow-up activities in the form of monitoring reports and site-visits by an external panel. The follow-up however depends on the type of agreement made between ACSUG and the evaluated institution. For example, not all institutions may have the financial resources for follow-up visits but will report to ACSUG regarding recommendations evaluation panels made and ask the agency for support in the implementation if needed.

Due to the timing of the agreements and start of the processes of the international evaluations, they are based on the ESG of 2005. The agency will use updated procedures based on the 2015 ESG in future agreements based on the 2018 evaluation guide for international reviews.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel encourages the agency to implement the 2018 evaluation guide for international evaluation processes based on the 2015 ESG.

Panel conclusion: fully 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

All evaluations (degrees, FIDES-AUDIT, DOCENTIA and International accreditations and evaluations) by ACSUG are carried out by an external evaluation committee. The SAR describes these committees as consisting of three or more members, including an academic, a professional and a student. The committee is supported by a secretary from the ACSUG technical staff. The composition of evaluation committees was confirmed by the panel during interviews with different stakeholders and evaluators.

ACSUG's staff proposes a team of evaluators based on [the guidelines for the selection of evaluators](#) and the profile that is required for the type of evaluation. The ACSUG staff proposes external experts from the agency's pool of evaluators to the CGIACA, who then appoints the committee members

based on availability, required profiles, and the selection guidelines. The guidelines, approved by the CGIACA, consist of requirements for the procedure of appointment and composition of the evaluation committee, including individual criteria for evaluators and the committee as a whole to ensure a committee that has a balanced expertise needed for a specific evaluation.

The agency's pool of evaluators is an elaborate database with evaluators with different profiles, which specifies the background and experience of each external expert. There are no public calls for evaluators. People can enrol at any time through the agency's website and are usually recruited by informal professional networks of people involved with ACSUG or their pool of evaluators. The enrolment in the ACSUG pool of evaluators is open, but only those who meet the criteria for experts, as described in the guidelines, will participate in reviews.

The pool consists of regional, national and international evaluators. The reviewer database is large, but the level of activity differs, and the number of active reviewers is smaller. In 2017 a total of 345 experts took part in assessments, some of whom in several procedures. Experts receive a compensation. After evaluators are appointed according to ACSUG's guidelines, they accept a confidentiality commitment that require objectivity and absence of conflict of interest. In addition, institutions have the opportunity to object to the composition of an evaluation panel after it is appointed, if they feel there could be a conflict of interest. All evaluators participated in a training when they were selected to participate in evaluations for ACSUG. There are different trainings for each type of evaluation. They are group sessions at the ACSUG office, in which all new evaluators (including students) take part together. The trainings include presentations with information on the process as well as evaluation exercises. Training materials, guidelines and protocols are digitally available to evaluators. During the interviews all evaluators confirmed that they received training when they started as an evaluator for ACSUG. The evaluators were satisfied with the training and support they received from ACSUG.

Surveys after evaluations and interviews during the visit show representatives from evaluated degrees and institutions are satisfied with the expertise of the external experts in the panels.

ACSUG reports that it has made efforts to include international evaluators in degree evaluation committees and expects this will increase in future. Evaluation panels in Latin-America may include one expert from the country in which the evaluation takes place but this is not common practice, the other evaluators are usually from Galicia and Spain. In DOCENTIA evaluations only the chair person is from Galicia.

Analysis

Based on the guidelines for selection of external experts and the information gathered in interviews during the site visit the panel concludes that the composition of the review panels is in line with the ESG. Because of the selection guidelines and scope of the database, the panel feels confident that the experts in ACSUG's pool cover a wide range of stakeholder profiles and expertise. This expertise could be further developed by increasing the inclusion of international experts in panels.

In accordance with the guidelines, careful selection and training of the external experts takes place for all evaluation activities. This is reflected in the quality of all reviews and satisfaction of regional and international stakeholders in evaluations. The panel recognises the effort ACSUG puts in the development of the skills of their experts, which is also appreciated by the external experts participating in evaluations. The panel noticed the student experts were very experienced due to their long involvement in the agency's evaluations.

During the visit the panel could not find any issues regarding the independence of experts in interviews with experts and representatives of institutions. The panel believe the no-conflict-of-interest policy works well despite of the relatively small region in which most of ACSUG’s operations take place.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel encourages the agency to pursue its efforts to increase the involvement of international experts in the panels.

Panel conclusion: fully 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

All of the agency’s assessment guides and protocols are published on the website. These protocols include explicit and published criteria for all of ACSUG’s evaluation processes. During interviews the representatives of universities described the criteria on which evaluations are based as very clear and well communicated and reported high satisfaction with the consistency with which they are applied.

ACSUG uses several mechanisms to ensure a consistent and systematic application of the criteria in the guidelines. These include:

- The selection and training of members of external evaluation committees to ensure they have the required knowledge of the sector and know how to evaluate against the criteria.
- The online evaluation platform that facilitates evaluation procedures and limits the possibilities of errors in documentation and subsequent evaluation.
- External experts participate in consensus meetings for evaluators in each branch of knowledge to develop a collective opinion on interpretation of standards of (telematic) evaluations.
- Chair persons of all evaluation committees participate in similar consensus meetings with other chair persons to discuss consistency of criteria over all branches of knowledge at the ACSUG office. In addition, the chair persons participate in all evaluations within their field of knowledge to ensure consistent application of criteria.
- The secretarial work carried out by the technical staff of the agency to ensure all evaluation criteria are covered and the reports are coherent within and between branches of knowledge. As described in the SAR and confirmed during the site visit, the latter do not only ensure the compliance and protocols, but also the coherence of results within and between branches as knowledge.

Analysis

During the site visit the panel confirmed that the criteria and protocols are publicly available, easily accessible to all stakeholders and that stakeholders get informed of the criteria before an evaluation starts. The views expressed in the various meetings indicated a sound system towards the consistency and fairness of different review processes.

The panel studied the criteria as well as the ways ACSUG ensures the consistency of outcomes. The panel recognises the value of the additional meetings for chair persons, the overview of processes they have by participating in several evaluations and the support by the technical staff of the agency to ensure consistency. Based on the protocols and interviews with stakeholders, the panel is convinced that ACSUG's approach guarantees a fair and helpful outcome of its processes, with a high level of consistency of evaluations without compromising the independence of final decisions.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

The 2014 review recommendation

(2005 ESG 2.5):

- ACSUG should consider how it might communicate the findings of its review reports to a wider readership as students, parents and sponsors, and employers become more sophisticated users of information and data about Universities and their programmes.
- ACSUG should check periodically the information needs of students, sponsors employers and Universities as users of its reports, and how its reports can better meet their needs.

Evidence

All evaluation processes that have a formal outcome end up with a written report. ACSUG explains in the SAR that the CGIACA appoints committees of experts who carry out the evaluation and prepare the reports with support of the ACSUG technical staff. ACSUG staff members serve as secretaries to the panels. During interviews with ACSUG staff and evaluators the panel learned that the ACSUG technical staff prepares a first draft based on the information gathered by the expert evaluators. The evaluators then comment on the report after which the secretary adapts the report whilst safeguarding consistency of interpretation of standards and reporting.

The reports are based on pre-established guidelines, protocols and criteria, which are all published online. Reports include a summary, short description of the context, experts involved, evidence, analysis and a conclusion which can include recommendations for follow-up, and good practices.

ACSUG's guidelines give evaluated institutions and individuals the opportunity to point out errors and make allegations based on the provisional report before it is finalised and, in case of evaluations, the CGIACA makes a decision. Both the evaluated entities (institutions and teaching staff) as well as ACSUG staff confirmed that the process works well and that misunderstandings are usually cleared up at this stage.

The reports are published on the agency's website together with the related decisions. The reports are also published on the websites of university programmes and centres, but according to feedback collected during the site visit, they are often difficult to find there due to the low visibility of the links to the reports.

All reports which are finalised and include a formal decision are published. The reason for which declined ex-ante accreditation reports cannot be found on the website, is that institutions withdraw their request for accreditation in the allegation stage before the agency finalises the report.

After every evaluation process a questionnaire is sent to all those involved. One question regards the clarity of the evaluation report, which according to the SAR is up to this point always rated above 3 out of a 5-point scale. The SAR and interviews with representatives of institutions show appreciation for the inclusion of good practices in the reports.

Reports concerning the SUG and other Spanish-speaking areas (such as other Spanish or Latin-American universities) are published in Spanish. In cases of international reports where Spanish is not an official language, reports are published in English.

Analysis

ACSUG has a database on their website where publications and evaluation reports are published and freely accessible to all stakeholders and external parties. The panel analysed several examples of reports and found that they are concise, well structured and use clear language. The reports could be further improved by including more space for self-reflection in the self-evaluation reports by the universities, which in turn could lead to a more analytical approach in the evaluation reports. In case of joint or inter-university degrees, the panel suggests adding the English name of the evaluated programme to the ACSUG report database where relevant. This will make it easier to find which degrees have been evaluated.

Although the agency's satisfaction surveys on evaluation results include an item on accessibility and clarity of reports, the interviews with the stakeholders showed that the reports are primarily used by the evaluated institutions to improve their programmes. The reports and outcomes do not seem to reach a lot of employers or students. ACSUG could, as suggested in the 2014 review, look into ways to communicate the information and findings of its reviews to a wider readership.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests adapting the structure of self-evaluation reports and external evaluation reports to stimulate a more self-critical and analytical approach in evaluation reports.
- The panel suggests adapting the database for reports of evaluation to include the English name of joint and inter-university degrees to increase their visibility.
- The panel suggests exploring ways to further disseminate information and data in reports to stakeholders such as students, parents and employers.

Panel conclusion: fully 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

The agency is governed by public law and therefore has to comply with general administrative regulations and legal regime for the public sector in Galicia. In compliance with these general

regulations, article 32 of ACSUG's statutes establishes that claims and appeals can be made by individuals and institutions evaluated by the agency. If issues do not get resolved by the processes ACSUG provides, decisions can be challenged in court.

The CGIACA is the highest evaluation body of the agency. It issues reports, evaluations, certification and accreditation, and is also responsible for resolving all complaints and appeals filed in relation to these processes. ACSUG does not have a separate appeals body.

All evaluated individuals and representatives of institutions interviewed by the panel appeared well informed about the complaints and appeals processes. During the evaluation process, those being evaluated are notified of the agency's preliminary decision. Thereafter they have the option to make a claim and provide additional evidence if they disagree with the report, process or decision, before a final decision is taken. This complaints and appeals process is integrated in the digital portal that individuals, institutions, evaluators and the agency use for all evaluation processes. All representatives of evaluated faculty and institutions report this IT platform and its appeals process is easy to use.

After the complaint is filed ACSUG's technical staff determines if the disagreement is a claim of 'form' or 'content', as stated in the SAR and confirmed during the visit. When the claim is a 'form' issue, e.g. a disagreement or complaint regarding the process, it is resolved directly by the CGIACA with help from legal counsel if needed. If the complaint is based on a substantive issue, i.e. a disagreement in the assessment carried out or the way criteria are interpreted, the CGIACA resends the evaluation file to the assessment committee (who carried out the initial assessment) together with the appeal. The assessment will be reviewed in light of the appellants' allegation. If the CGIACA considers that the committee unjustifiably deviated from the evaluation criteria, the CGIACA can send the file to a third evaluator to issue a complementary report. This complementary report will help the CGIACA make their final decision.

This appeals procedure within the evaluation process intends to give those evaluated the possibility to appeal for reconsideration of the decision before resorting to a jurisdictional route. During the interviews it was clear that this possibility was highly appreciated by those evaluated by the agency.

After this internal appeals process, it is possible to take a juridical route in case of dissatisfaction with the outcome. Out of the approximately 27,000 evaluations carried out in the area of teaching staff only 11 cases have reached the courts, all of which were ruled in favour of ACSUG. With regard to programme evaluations the resolution of appeals has always been settled in the stage between the interim report and the final report.

Analysis

The panel recognises that the agency has created a complaints and appeals process that is well embedded in the legal context of which the agency operates and highly appreciated by evaluated faculty members, programmes and centres. The process allows those evaluated to challenge interim reports before CGIACA makes a final decision, which avoids unnecessary court procedures.

The agency does not clearly distinguish between a complaint procedure, to state dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out, and an appeals procedure, in which the outcome of the process is questioned. Based on the interviews with staff and representatives of evaluated faculty and institutions, the panel confirms that both aspects are covered in the complaints and appeals procedure which is integrated into the evaluation process.

During interviews it became clear that representatives of faculty and institutions are well aware of the complaints and appeals procedure and see it as trustworthy and accessible.

The panel remarks that the CGIACA both takes the interim decisions and the final decisions after a claim by a person or institution. It is not possible to appeal a final decision by the CGIACA unless one goes to court because there is no separate appeals body within the agency. The CGIACA thus re-evaluates their initial decision based on a claim, and in the case of a substantive claim, issue a complementary report. Even though cases rarely go to court, it would be valuable to include another body in the complaints and appeals process to re-assess the decisions made by the CGIACA in case of an appeal to ensure fair decision-making.

Panel recommendation

- The panel recommends establishing an independent committee or body to evaluate appeals of decisions made by the CGIACA before starting the juridical procedure.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1

The panel commends the strong influence of ACSUG activities across the SUG, recognised by all the stakeholders as seminal for ensuring quality in universities.

The international activities of the Agency are very valuable and much appreciated by the foreign universities involved.

ESG 3.2

The panel commends the development and implementation of the new statutes in 2018.

ESG 3.5

The panel commends the multi-annual budget settlement greatly contributes to the predictability of operations through the existence of good forward planning and sustainability of the agency's activities.

ESG 2.1

The panel commends ACSUG for the strength of the system which is reflected in the wide-spread implementation of the FIDES-AUDIT programme.

The panel commends ACSUG for its role in translating and applying the ESG to different contexts in Latin-America.

ESG 2.2

The panel commends the introduction of the regular meta-evaluation of processes with stakeholders since 2014.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

The summary of the compliance assessment by the panel looks as follows:

- Fully compliant for the following ESGs: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6.
- Substantially compliant in the following ESGs: 2.7, 3.5 and 3.6.
- Partially compliant in ESG 3.4.

ESG 3.1 – Fully compliant

ESG 3.2 – Fully compliant

ESG 3.3 – Fully compliant

ESG 3.4 – Partially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The panel recommends that the agency develops their thematic analysis based on the data they gather in their external quality assurance activities.
- The panel recommends that, pending the appointment of additional staff, the agency explore options for outsourcing the work of thematic analysis.

ESG 3.5 – Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The panel recommends that the agency continues to work to solve the issues related to the vacancies with the ministry in order to ensure full staffing as soon as possible.
- The panel recommends that the agency uses its unused funds to creatively outsource some work, for example the translation of the ESG to Galician and thematic analysis.
- The panel recommends recruiting experts from outside of Galicia for all its governing and evaluation bodies.

ESG 3.6 – Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

- The panel recommends the agency to develop a policy for equal opportunity that also guards against intolerance or any kind of discrimination, which covers the agency and all its activities.

ESG 3.7 – Fully compliant

ESG 2.1 – Fully compliant

ESG 2.2 – Fully compliant

ESG 2.3 – Fully compliant

ESG 2.4 – Fully compliant

ESG 2.5 – Fully compliant

ESG 2.6 – Fully compliant

ESG 2.7 – Substantially compliant

Panel recommendation:

- The panel recommends using an independent committee or body to evaluate appeals of decisions made by the CGIACA before starting the jurisdictional procedure.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The panel would like to make some general and more detailed suggestions, extending beyond strictly interpreted ESG and/or linking several ESG, which ACSUG may wish to consider when reflecting on its further development. Some of them have already been signalled in the previous sections.

ESG 3.1

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

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

ESG 3.3

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

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

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

ESG 2.1

The panel encourages ACSUG to follow up on translating the ESG 2015 to Galician to increase their visibility.

ESG 2.2

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

ESG 2.3

The panel encourages the agency to implement the 2018 evaluation guide for international evaluation processes based on the 2015 ESG.

ESG 2.4

The panel encourages the agency to pursue its efforts to increase the involvement of international experts in the panels.

ESG 2.6

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

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

The panel suggests exploring ways to further disseminate information and data in reports to stakeholders such as students, parents and employers.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

20.03.2019		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
09.00-11.00	Review panel's private meeting at ACSUG's office	
11.00-11.25	A pre-visit meeting with the agency contact person to clarify elements related to the overall system and context (if requested)	Panel and ENQA-coordinator Contact person (Luis Carlos Velón Sixto)
	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 1 11:40-12:15	Meeting with the SAR team ACSUG	Luis Carlos Velón Sixto, ACSUG Quality and International Relations Manager Marta Mallo Rey, ACSUG Technician of Programmes Unit Santiago Domínguez Martínez, ACSUG Administrative assistant
	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 2 12:30-13:15	Meeting with the ACSUG Director and President of the Governing Board.	José Eduardo Lopez Pereira, ACSUG Director María Patrocinio Morrondo Pelayo, ACSUG President
	<i>Lunch (panel only)</i>	
Session 3 14:45-15:15	Meeting with ACSUG Executive Committee (Gabinete de Dirección)	Luis Carlos Velón Sixto, Quality and International Relations Manager Ana Isabel López Lorenzo, Direction Secretariat and Communication
	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 4 15:30-16:30	Meeting with the Galician Committee on Reports, Verification, Certification and Accreditation (CGIACA)	Miguel Ángel Santos Rego, CGIACA president. University Professor in Theory and History of Education at the USC. Ana María Pita Grandal, CGIACA academic member. University Professor in Tax and Finance Law at the UVigo Juan Touriño Dominguez. CGIACA academic member. University professor in Computer Architecture and Technology at the UDC

		Óscar Moldes Pita, CGIACA student representative. He is studying a bachelor degree in the UVigo Francisco Domínguez Martínez, CGIACA member representing Galicia's business and professional area.
	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 5 16:45-17:30	Meeting with the ACSUG President and Governing Board (Consello Reitor)	María Patrocinio Morrondo Pelayo, ACSUG President Carmen Pomar Tojo, Galician Minister of Education, Universities and Vocational Training Julio Ernesto Abalde Alonso, UDC Rector Antonio López Díaz, USC Rector Manuel Reigosa Roger, UVigo Rector Moraima Pérez Míguez (USC), representative of students
	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 6 17:45-18:25	Meeting with the Advisory Council (Consello asesor)	César Chaparro Gómez, Advisory Council president. University Professor in Latin Philology at the Extremadura University (Spain) Jorge Delgado García, Advisory Council national academic member. University Professor in Cartographic, Geodetic and Photogrammetric Engineering at the Jaen University (Spain). Marta Amate López, Advisory Council representative from the business sector José Manuel Cabrera Sixto, Advisory Council international member. Agricultural Mechanical Engineering from the Guanajuato University (México) – video conference.
18:30-19:00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day II	
<i>21:00</i>	<i>Dinner (panel only)</i>	
21.03.2019		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
09:00-09:30	Review panel private meeting at ACSUG's office	
Session 7 09:30-10:45	Meeting with ACSUG staff: teaching, programmes and management units.	Isabel Belmonte Otero, Programmes Unit Technician María Dolores Castro Pais, Programmes Unit Technician María Virtudes Couceiro Novais, Administrative assistant Aitor Martínez Lafuente, Economic Matters and Human Resources Technician Francisco Rico Rey, Technician in Teaching Staff María Dolores Sierra Sánchez, Computer Services Technician

	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 8 11:00-12:10	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool.	<p>Emilio Martín Gutiérrez, Structures and Continuous Media Mechanics University Professor at the UDC. Reviewer with experience in international evaluations.</p> <p>Marta González Moldes, Professional auditor at the Trillium Consulting company, located in Santiago de Compostela. Reviewer, with a professional profile, in the FIDES-AUDIT programme, international evaluations and centre and degrees assessment in the Architecture and Engineering area.</p> <p>Laureano González Vega, Algebra University Professor at the Cantabria University (Spain). Reviewer in the FIDES-AUDIT programme, and centre and degrees assessment in the Sciences area</p> <p>Manuel Fernandez Cruz, University Professor in the Department of Didactics and School Management at the Granada University (Spain). Reviewer in the DOCENTIA Programme and centre and degrees assessment in the Social and Legal Sciences area</p> <p>Manuel Fernández Sande, Journalism University Professor at the Madrid Complutense University (UCM) (Spain). Reviewer in institutional accreditation and centre and degrees assessment in the Social and Legal Sciences area</p> <p>Carlos Seoane Prado, Organic Chemistry University Profesor at the Madrid Complutense University (UCM) (Spain). Reviewer in research and teaching staff assessment, complementary bonuses and university research evaluation.</p>
	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 9 12:25-13:15	Meeting with representatives of HEIs.	<p>Enrique Castello Mayo, coordinator of USC degrees in the field of journalism.</p> <p>Raquel Gandón Chapela, Staff from the UVigo Quality Assurance Area</p> <p>Nancy Vázquez Veiga, UDC Vice-Rector of Academic and Teaching Innovation issues</p> <p>Manuel Ramos Cabrer, UVigo Vice-Rector of Academic Organization and Teaching Staff</p> <p>Gumersindo Feijoo Costa, USC Vice-Rector of Planning and Strategic Development.</p>
	<i>Lunch (panel only)</i>	
Session 10 14:45-15:30 45 minutes	<p>Meeting with teaching staff of Galician Universities.</p> <p>Who, between them, have experience with the Teaching Staff and Research Assessment; assessment for complementary bonuses; and the DOCENTIA programme.</p>	<p>Fernando López Alsina, Medieval History University Professor at the USC. He has been assessed in the complementary bonuses processes. He is the coordinator of a University Research Group.</p> <p>Margarita Estévez Saa - English Philology University Professor at the USC. She has been evaluated by ACSUG in the Teaching Staff Accreditation and the DOCENTIA process. She is also participating in a University Research Group.</p> <p>Manuel Peralbo Uzquiano, Psychology University Professor at the UDC. He has been assessed in the DOCENTIA process. He is the coordinator of a University Research group.</p>

		Carmen Ruíz Hidalgo, Financial and Tax Law University Professor at the UVigo. She has been assessed in the complementary bonuses processes. She is also participating in a University Research Group.
	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 11 15:45-16:30	Meeting with students currently studying at Galician Universities (or very recent alumni) with experience of ACSUG reviews and activities.	<p>Alexandre Vecino Aguirre, recent alumni of Legal and Social Sciences at the USC and member of the degrees evaluation committees of ACSUG. He has experience in international evaluations. He takes part also in the analysis group for the Master degrees labour insertion.</p> <p>Julia Ammerman Yebra, student of Law at the USC and member of the degrees evaluation committees of ACSUG.</p> <p>Gladiis Ferreira Troncoso, student of Health Sciences at the UVIGO and member of the degrees evaluation committees of ACSUG. She is also participating in the FIDES-AUDIT programme.</p> <p>Marta López López, student of Arts and Humanities at the UVIGO and member of the degrees evaluation committees of ACSUG.</p> <p>Pablo Campo Prieto, student of Health Sciences at the UVIGO and member of the degrees evaluation committees of ACSUG. He has participated in the institutional accreditation assessment.</p> <p>David Chapela de la Campa, student of Doctorate at the USC in the field of data mining. He is a member of the degrees evaluation committees of ACSUG.</p>
	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 12 16:45-17:30	Meeting with stakeholders, selected by the agency.	<p>Ernesto Pedrosa Silva, President of the Social Council of UVigo. Member of the ACSUG Governing Board and member of the Galician Council of Universities.</p> <p>José Carlos de Miguel, member of the ACSUG Governing Board and member of the Galician Council of Universities. ACSUG collaborator in the field of the Master degrees labour insertion studies.</p> <p>Rosa Crujeiras, representative of the statistical analysis group of the labour insertion studies.</p> <p>Celso Rodríguez Fernández, Algebra University Professor of the USC. External collaborator in the design and development of the ACSUG Strategic Plan 2016-2020.</p> <p>Antonio Serrano, Director of the Aragon Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ACPUA)</p>
	<i>Break – review panel's discussion</i>	
Session 13 17:45-18:30	Meeting with reviewed Latin-American institutions (video-conference).	Rosario Haydée Bazán Asencios, representative from the San Martín de Porres University (USMP) from Lima (Perú). She is the quality manager in the Faculty of Dentistry.

		Edith Hernandez Lagunes, representative from the Anáhuac Xalapa University (UAX) from Xalapa (México). She is the university coordinator with ACSUG. Julio Sánchez Mariñez, Rector of the “Instituto Superior de Formación Docente Salome Ureña (ISFODOSU)” from Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic)
18:30-19:00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day III and provisional conclusions	
<i>21:00</i>	<i>Dinner (panel only)</i>	
22.03.2019		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
09:00-10:00	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	
10:00-10:30	Meeting with ACSUG Director and Contact Person to clarify any pending issues	José Eduardo Lopez Pereira, ACSUG Director Luis Carlos Velón Sixto, ACSUG Quality and International Relations Manager
10:30-12:00	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings	
12:00-12:30	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Council, Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (ACSUG) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

July 2018

1. Background and Context

The Axencia para a Calidade do Sistema Universitario de Galicia (ACSUG) (Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System) was legally established on 30 January 2001 as a consortium between the Regional Government of Galicia and the three Galician universities. ACSUG has full legal personality and the necessary independence to be able to achieve its objectives to rigorous standards fully respecting university autonomy.

The basic mission of the ACSUG is to promote and oversee guaranteeing the quality of the Galician University System (SUG), focusing on its continuous improvement and transferring relevant information to society about the activities carried out and their results, ensuring that the SUG is constantly adapted to the social and economic situation at any given moment.

The ACSUG seeks to be an agency of demonstrated quality and efficiency and to be recognised as such at both national and international level, in the sphere of university quality assurance, carrying out its work according to the principles of independence, objectivity and transparency, based on national and international standards for higher education quality assurance.

To deal with an effective and efficient performance of its activities, the ACSUG has implemented since 2009 an Internal Quality Assurance and Environmental Management System, certified externally by the Spanish Association of Certification and standardisation (AENOR).

The ACSUG has also established a Strategic Plan for the period 2016-2020, that defines with the necessary clarity all of the strategic goals to be achieved in the next few years, and to plan the necessary mechanisms and actions to ensure reaching these objectives.

With respect to the internationalization, since its creation, the ACSUG has considered extremely important to establish relationships and exchange information, at both the national and international level, with other quality agencies and organizations with activities related to university education. Such relationships can assist with continual improvement of the activities performed as well as with ongoing adaptation to the situation faced by higher education at any given time.

ACSUG has been an ENQA member since 2009, renewing the membership in 2014 and is currently applying for renewal of its membership.

ACSUG has been registered on EQAR since 2010, renewing the registration in 2014 and is currently applying for renewal of registration.

ACSUG has been also a member of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) since June 2013.

During all this period, ACSUG has taken part, normally (but not only) in relation with the aforementioned organizations, in several working groups, seminars, projects, studies, publications, etc.

The ACSUG has also carried out, since 2011, evaluation processes of degrees and faculties' outside Spain, mainly in Peru and México.

To conclude, the last remarkable issue is that In January 2018, a new version of the ACSUG statutes has been approved.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

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

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

2.1 Activities of ACSUG within the scope of the ESG

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

The following activities of ACSUG have to be addressed in the external review:

Activities at programme level

- Assessment cycle of Galician degrees: validation (ex-ante accreditation), monitoring, modifications and accreditation (cyclical process).
- Joint programme accreditation

Activities at institutional level

- Assessment of institutional Quality Assurance Systems (FIDES-AUDIT program).
- Teaching performance assessment program (DOCENTIA program).
- Institutional accreditation of Galician faculties.

International evaluations

- Assessment (evaluation and accreditation) of degrees and university centres outside Spain.

ACSUG is considering including the following activities in its regular external QA activities:

- Institutional monitoring
- Evaluation of arts degrees.

These activities should thus be considered in the external review of ACSUG, as far as they can be, based on their stage of development at the time of the review.

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

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

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution and student member. One of the members will serve 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.

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

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

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

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

ACSUG is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account 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 broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current

situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.

- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which ACSUG fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership. The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre- scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre- scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

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

The review panel will be assisted by ACSUG in arriving in Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on compliance or granting of ENQA membership.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

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

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

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

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

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

ACSUG will consider the expert panel’s report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. ACSUG commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board’s decision.

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

5. Use of the report

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

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

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

6. Budget

ACSUG shall pay the following review related fees:

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

Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR
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This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, ACSUG will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to ACSUG if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

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

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

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	June/July 2018
Appointment of review panel members	November 2018
Self-assessment completed	By mid-December 2018
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	December 2018/early January
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	2019 February 2019
Briefing of review panel members	Late February 2019
Review panel site visit	Late March 2019
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	By mid-May 2019
Draft of evaluation report to ACSUG	June 2019
Statement of ACSUG to review panel if necessary	June 2019
Submission of final report to ENQA	June/July 2019
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of ACSUG	September 2019
Publication of the report	September/October 2019

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ACSUG	Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System
ACPUA	Aragon Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation
AENOR	Spanish Association for Standardisation and Certification
ANECA	National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation
CGIACA	Galician Committee for Reports, Assessment, Certification and Accreditation
CURSA	University Commission for the Regulation of Monitoring and Accreditation
ECA	European Consortium for 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>
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
ISFODOSU	Superior Teaching Institute Docente Salomé Ureña, Dominican Republic
LOU	Spanish Law 6/2011 of 21 December, on Universities
LSUG	Law 6/2013 of 13 June, on the Galician University System
QA	quality assurance
QAS	Quality Assurance Systems
REACU	Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies
RUCT	Registry of Universities, Centres and Qualifications
SAR	self-assessment report
SEC	Study Programmes Evaluation Committee (Comisión de Evaluación de Rama)
SER	Self-evaluation report
SINEACE	National System of Evaluation, Accreditation and Certification of the Educational Quality of Peru
SUE	Spanish University System
SUG	Galician University System
UDC	University of A Coruña
USC	University of Santiago de Compostela
UANCV	Néstor Cáceres Velásquez Andean University, Peru
UAC	Anáhuac Cancún University, Mexico
UAX	Anáhuac Xalapa University, Mexico
USMP	University of San Martín de Porres, Peru
UVI	University of Vigo

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ACSUG

Before the site visit as Annex to the SAR

- Main data about the SUG
- ACSUG Statutes 2018
- ACSUG Strategic Plan (2016-2020)
- General Procedure for the selection of assessors
- Quality and Environmental Policy

Before the site visit at the request of the panel

- Minutes of meetings of the Advisory Council
- Minutes of meetings of the CGIACA
- Minutes of meetings of the Governing Board
- Reports of degrees ex-ante assessment
- Reports of degrees ex-post assessment
- Reports of degrees modification
- Reports of degree monitoring
- Reports of DOCENTIA evaluation
- Reports of the FIDES-AUDIT
- Reports of Institutional Accreditation

During the site visit

- Context analysis document, 22nd of February 2019
- Risk analysis document, 22nd of February 2019
- Internal Quality Assurance report on the year 2018, dated 25th of February 2019
- Environmental report 2018, also published on the website.
- List of training activities in which the ACSUG staff participated from 2016 to 2018
- Training seminar programme for future evaluators from September and October 2012
- Training seminar programmes for active evaluators of degrees from January 2018 and January 2019.
- International training seminar programme for university representatives from USMP (Peru) March 20-23, 2016 and ISFODOSU (the Dominican Republic) April 23-27, 2018
- Criteria for meta-evaluation of assessments, approved on July 14th, 2016

OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

- The website of the agency – ACSUG



THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System, undertaken in 2019.



2019 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW