

**Report of the panel of the ENQA coordinated review of  
the Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de  
Catalunya (AQU Catalunya)**

**July 2012**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

The review of AQU Catalunya was of type 'B', and in addition to the usual ENQA membership criteria, considered the Agency's responsibility for various aspects of the assessment of staff.

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence it considered, the Review Panel is satisfied that AQU Catalunya is in compliance with the *ENQA Membership Provisions*. Overall, the panel notes that the agency fully complies with ESG 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5; and substantially complies with ESG 3.1 and 3.6.

AQU Catalunya has made very great progress since the review of 2007, when it was last considered for ENQA membership.

It is the Review Panel's understanding that AQU Catalunya is a dynamic agency, which takes every opportunity to improve its own work and enhance quality in Higher Education Institutions. AQU Catalunya involves representatives of universities fully in its work. Its methodology, procedures and reports are readily available in a variety of formats, including a well-structured website.

In relation to the assessment of academic staff, the Panel considered that procedures are proportionate and fulfil their aims. Procedures, criteria and appeals procedures are published on the AQU Catalunya website.

The panel considers that some aspects of the academic staff assessment function could be better integrated and thus welcomes plans in a new Bill for the merger of the 'commissions' responsible.

## 2. Glossary of acronyms

ANECA	National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain
AQU Catalunya	Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya (Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency)
CAQ	Quality Assurance Commission, AQU
CAR	Research Assessment Commission, AQU
CLiC	Commission that deals with junior lecturer and auxiliary teaching staff, AQU
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
HEI	Higher Education Institution
INQAHEE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
LOMLOU	Organic Law 4/2007, 12 April, which amended Organic Law 6/2001, 21 December, on universities in Spain
LOU	Organic Law 6/2001, 21 December, on universities in Spain
LUC	Law 1/2003, 19 February, on universities in Catalonia (Catalan Universities Act) VSMA Validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation

### **3. Introduction**

This is the report of the review of Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya (AQU Catalunya) undertaken in May, 2012 for the purpose of determining whether the Agency meets the criteria for full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The membership provisions are listed in Annex 1 to the report.

#### **3.1 Background and outline of the review process**

In November 2004, the General Assembly of ENQA agreed that the third part of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) should be incorporated into its regulations. The ESG were subsequently adopted at the Bergen ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in 2005. Substantial compliance with the ESG thus became the principal criterion for full membership of ENQA. The ESG expect quality assurance agencies to undergo cyclical external review.

ENQA's regulations require all full member agencies to be externally reviewed at least once every five years in order to verify that they continue to fulfil the membership provisions.

The external review of AQU Catalunya was conducted in line with the process described in *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The review panel was appointed by ENQA, and included the following members:

- Prof David Timms, former Deputy Vice Chancellor, Bath Spa University and Higher Education Consultant, UK – *CHAIR*
- Agnes Leinweber, German Accreditation Council (GAC), Germany – *SECRETARY*
- Teresa Sanchez, Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (CTI), France
- Tia Loukkola, European University Association (EUA), Belgium
- Nadja Kiiskinen, University of Tampere, Finland

In addition to the usual external review requirements, the review panel was requested to comment on the AQU Catalunya academic staff quality programme, which makes judgements on the eligibility of individuals to be university academic staff, and to be promoted. The programme is a Spanish Government requirement.

AQU Catalunya produced a self-evaluation report, which provided a substantial portion of the evidence used by the Panel to form its conclusions. The Panel also considered a range of documentary evidence, much of which was available on the AQU website. Following these investigations, the Panel visited AQU Catalunya and interviewed a range of AQU Catalunya staff, university representatives, students and representatives of the Catalanian ministry, to validate the self-evaluation and clarify points at issue. The Review Panel confirms that it was given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review process, and produced the present report on the basis of all the evidence available.

AQU Catalunya was invited to comment on the factual accuracy of the report before finalisation.

### **3.2 The higher education system in Catalonia**

The Catalan higher education system consists of twelve universities, seven of which are public, four private and one of a mixed nature. In the 2010-2011 academic year 246,655 students were enrolled in Catalan universities, of whom 70% were in public higher education institutions (HEIs); 18,572 teachers were in post; and 1,191 programmes were offered, of which 445 were at Bachelor's level, 483 at Master's, and 263 at Doctoral level.

Higher education in Catalonia is regulated by both the Spanish Constitution and the Statute of Autonomy for Catalunya. The distribution of powers lies exclusively with the State, which regulates the promotion and general coordination of scientific and technical research, staff regulations and conditions of employment. The State also determines conditions for obtaining, issuing and recognition of academic and professional awards, and the statutory provisions for higher education and university autonomy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Article 149.1.1a, 15a, 18a, 30a of the Spanish Constitution.

Pursuant to Article 172 of the Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia, the exclusive competence of the autonomous community of Catalonia includes the programming and coordination of the higher education system in Catalonia; the degree-awards available; university funding; the remuneration and conditions of academic and research staff contracted by universities; and the conditions for additional benefits for those academic staff who are also in the public service (i.e. civil servants). Responsibilities shared between the State and the autonomous community of Catalonia include regulation of requirements for the setting up and recognition of universities; the legal system for the organisation and running of public universities; the regulation of contract and public service teaching and research staff; and the evaluation and assurance of quality and excellence in university education, which includes the assessment of teaching and research staff.

The basic university regulations are mainly laid down in Organic Law 6/2001 (LOU) (Spanish Universities Act), which also determines the competences of the universities, the regional authorities and the Spanish national authorities.<sup>2</sup>

In Catalonia the principal guideline is Law 1/2003 (LUC) (hereafter, the Catalan Universities Act). This defines the objectives and other aspects of higher education, and legislates for the quality assurance system. The internal structure and overall functions of AQU Catalunya are mainly determined by the Catalan Universities Act.

In keeping with the structure of Spanish state, with its strong, autonomous regions, the national system of external quality assurance consists of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) and 10 regional agencies, of which AQU Catalunya is one of the only five agencies that are full member of ENQA and EQAR included”.

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<sup>2</sup> The Spanish Universities Act was amended by Organic Law 4/2007, 12 April, ([LOMLOU](#)) in 2007.

### **3.3 Main functions of AQU Catalunya**

AQU Catalunya is the first quality assurance agency established in Spain and it was created in 1996 as a consortium of universities before the regulation of the Spanish system of external quality assurance established in 2002. The Catalan Universities Act of 2003 gave the Agency its legal status.

The functions ascribed to AQU Catalunya pursuant to Art. 140 of the Catalan Universities Act are as follows:

- *The QA of degree courses leading to the award of recognised and non-recognised (awarded by a specific HEI) awards taught at universities and other HEIs.*
- *Certification of the quality of university degree courses, management and activities.*
- *Degree course accreditation within the context of quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.*
- *The institutional review of HEIs established in Catalonia that offer programmes leading to higher degrees awarded by foreign HEIs.*
- *Accreditation of QA systems and processes in universities, including teaching.*
- *The issuance of pre-recruitment reports and accreditation for teaching staff.*
- *Quality assurance of research work by researchers.*
- *Quality assurance of research and management by teaching and research staff in relation to salary bonuses.*
- *Quality assurance of research by teaching and research staff at private universities.*
- *Quality assurance of the activities, programmes, services and management of universities and other higher education institutions.*
- *The promotion of quality assurance and comparison of quality criteria at European and international levels.*
- *To conduct studies on the enhancement and innovation of models for review, certification and accreditation.*
- *To issue review reports for the universities, education authorities, social partners and society in general.*
- *Expertise and advice for government education authorities, universities and other institutions within the scope of its functions.*
- *To establish cooperation and collaboration with other regional, national and international agencies that have the functions of quality assurance, accreditation and certification.*
- *All tasks commissioned to it by the competent government department with jurisdiction over universities and the universities, by means of agreement.*

In relation to the quality assurance of programmes, AQU Catalunya has a 'Framework' for the validation, monitoring, modification and accreditation of

recognised programmes (VSMA Framework)<sup>3</sup>, which was endorsed in 2010 by the Agency's Board of Management and has been implemented since 2011. The Framework is based on regulations by the Spanish government and implemented by all Spanish agencies.

Validation of new programmes by AQU Catalunya is a pre-condition for authorisation by the Catalan government. Authorised study programmes are entered in the Spanish Register of Higher Education Institutions and Programmes (RUCT), and they can then be introduced. Subsequent to validation, the university has to submit an annual progress report for each programme (Monitoring), including quantitative indicators, and dealing with such matters as minor curriculum changes. A sample of annual monitoring reports is assessed by AQU Catalunya.

AQU Catalunya's 'Modification' procedure deals with programme changes that are substantial. If such modifications affect the administrative definition or the essential academic characteristics of a degree programme or award, it must undergo a new validation process.

Within six years of the initial (or most recent) validation of Bachelor's and Doctorate degrees, and within four years in case of Master's degrees, programmes must be 'Accredited' by AQU Catalunya. 'Accreditation' includes a site visit and a report.<sup>4</sup>

In 2007, AQU Catalunya developed in co-operation with the national agency of Spain (ANECA) and the Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (ACSUG) a voluntary institutional review programme called 'Audit', which was completed recently with the end of the first cycle. Audit focuses on internal quality management systems. 75% of all faculties at Catalan universities have participated in the programme.

Staff in Catalonian public universities may be in public service (civil servants), where national conditions of service apply; or 'contract' teaching and research staff, whose conditions of service are determined locally. Since 2003, AQU Catalunya has been responsible for the assessment of contract academic staff prior to selection by Catalan public universities for the posts of collaborating

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<sup>3</sup> The Catalan acronym for the four framework processes (V) verificació, (S) seguiment, (M) modificació and (A) acreditació.

<sup>4</sup> Please see self-evaluation report p. 14-16.

lecturers, tenure-track lecturers, tenured assistant professors and full professors. It assesses academic staff at the private universities in Catalonia in compliance with the Catalan Universities Act, which lays down that 50% of university teaching staff must be in possession of a doctorate, of whom 60% must be accredited by a QA agency. Since 2006, AQU Catalunya has been assessing individual merits of public service staff in teaching, research and management, and of contract teaching and research staff within the framework of merit-based salary bonuses.

AQU Catalunya is active in international organizations: AQU Catalunya was a founder member of ENQA (2000), and its full membership was reconfirmed following the first international external review on compliance with the ESG in 2007. It is also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR, 2008) and a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE, 1998) and the European Consortium for Accreditation, ECA (2009).

### **3.4 Structure of AQU Catalunya**

The governance structure of AQU Catalunya consists of a Board of Management, chaired by a President, and a number of 'commissions': the Quality Assessment Commission (CAQ), the Collaborating and Tenure-Track Teaching Staff Commission (CLiC) and the Research Assessment Commission (CAR). The composition of the bodies is laid down in the Catalan Universities Act.

The President, who acts as the institutional representative of AQU Catalunya, is appointed by the Executive Council of the government of Catalonia for a period of four years, which is renewable.

The President is the chairperson of both the Board of Management and its Standing Committee. The Board of Management consists of the rectors of the public universities and the rector of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, a maximum of three rectors from private universities, the chairs of the boards of trustees of the public universities, three prominent individuals from the academic community, two members from the competent government department with jurisdiction over universities, the chairs of the 'commissions', and the Director of AQU Catalunya. The Board of Management is responsible for the

Agency's strategic plans, and for approving the Agency's accounts (balance sheet, results account and financial statement).

The Director or Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the implementation of the Agency's strategic plan, and the management of day-to-day business. The Director is designated by the competent government department with jurisdiction over universities for a period of four years, which may be extended twice.

In relation to the ESG, the most important body is the Quality Assessment Commission (CAQ), chaired by the Director of AQU Catalunya. The CAQ is in charge of programme validation and accreditation within the VSMA Framework, institutional audits, and the assessment of the merits of academic staff for management and teaching purposes.

The CAQ has six committees: five represent individual branches of knowledge, and work within the VSMA Framework. The sixth committee assesses academic staff in the context of the "Docentia" programme, which is discussed below (see Section 5, below). The chairs of the committees are members of CAQ, which also includes international academics.

Prior to selection by Catalan universities, applicants for academic positions must be accredited by AQU Catalunya or the Spanish national agency (ANECA). The academic positions being assessed by CAR are those which are local to Catalonia, however Catalan universities can also enrol professors accredited by ANECA. Each commission has a President appointed by the regional Catalan government, and their tasks and structures are similar. Each commission is responsible for establishing the general criteria it applies, and acts through specific review committees for different subject areas. CLiC assesses applicants of tenure-track lecturers and collaborating staff positions, and CAR assesses candidates for becoming tenured assistant professors and full professors in Catalan universities.

In 2010, the Agency established the AQU Student Commission, whose task is to systematise the participation of the student body, to advise the Agency on projects that have a direct impact on students, and to participate in studies of interest to the student body.

#### **4. Compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines**

The following judgements are based on the self-evaluation document, analysis of AQU Catalunya documents, and interviews during the site visit (the schedule is attached in Annex 1). The Review Panel was grateful for AQU's very open approach, which facilitated free and frank communication in all interviews.

The Panel considered that AQU Catalunya is a dynamic agency oriented towards the enhancement of quality in higher education institutions and improving its own work. In recent years AQU Catalunya has successfully integrated feedback and review mechanisms into its activities.

In particular the Panel was impressed by high level of motivation of AQU Catalunya staff, and the excellent use of IT for internal and external communication. AQU Catalunya puts great effort into building up strong relationships with stakeholders and has created an atmosphere of trust with public and private universities.

AQU is a regular and often a leading contributor to the different ENQA initiatives and events. The AQU Catalunya self-evaluation report was informative and well written. The Review Panel experienced some difficulty with access to AQU Catalunya documents in English translation, but this was largely overcome since one member of the Review Panel was Spanish, and two more fluent in the language. Spanish language expertise was also helpful in interviews.

AQU Catalunya has made great progress since it was last considered for ENQA membership, in 2007. The 2007 review found that AQU Catalunya had little sense of strategic direction, external pressure forcing it into uncoordinated short term activities. The Agency was fully compliant with ESG 3.2 and 3.8 only. With regard to the remaining ESG, the 2007 review panel made a number of criticisms, for example, lack of strategic planning (ESG 2.2), no publication of final results of ex-ante evaluations of master's programmes (ESG 2.5), low level of accountability in follow-up procedures (ESG 2.6), no periodic activities (ESG 3.3), and miscellaneous activities assigned by law with no clear priorities (ESG 3.5). The present review found that AQU Catalunya has made significant improvements in all these areas.

## **4.1 ESG Part 2: External quality assurance processes, ESG 3.1, ESG 3.3: Activities**

### **2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures**

#### **STANDARD:**

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

### **Evidence**

The Audit programme assesses design and function of the internal quality management systems of universities or faculties on a voluntary basis. Audits consider both implementation and continuous improvement in internal quality management systems.<sup>5</sup>

The VSMA Framework requires an annual monitoring report for each accredited study programme dealing with its development<sup>6</sup>, which must use evidence gained from the internal quality management system<sup>7</sup>.

### **Analysis**

In the VSMA Framework, internal quality assurance processes of universities are mainly taken into account in the monitoring process. The annual progress report prepared by a programme includes information about the delivery of the course, access, fees, curriculum, practical training etc. Universities are required to report on the outcomes of their quality assurance system and their enhancement activities. AQU Catalunya asks for an analysis of quantitative indicators of the development of study programmes, and how universities reflect on students' achievement. The Framework also takes into account the fitness for purpose of universities' quality management systems.

<sup>5</sup> Please see: "Audit Programme – Guide for assessing the design of the internal quality assurance system for university education (document 04)"

<sup>6</sup> Please see „Framework for the ex-ante assessment, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised degrees" July 2010, p 7.

<sup>7</sup> Please see self-evaluation report p. 28.

The panel found the form of the progress report sufficient for checking whether universities are implementing Part 1 of ESG. However, the report does not encourage deep insight into the implementation of ESG Part 1, and has limited coverage. For example, the information required in the progress reports on policies for quality enhancement (ESG 1.1), and on published criteria, regulations and procedures for student assessments (ESG 1.3) is scant. The panel recommends that the form and demands of the progress report in the VSMA Framework should be more clearly focussed on ESG Part 1.

AQU Catalunya should continue to focus on the internal quality management of HEIs, which was a feature of the voluntary Audit programme.

## **Conclusion**

In view of the limitations of the progress report regarding ESG Part 1, the Panel concludes that AQU Catalunya substantially complies with ESG 3.1.

### **2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes**

#### **STANDARD:**

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used. As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

## **Evidence**

AQU Catalunya describes in the self-evaluation report (p. 29) the process of developing its QA activities as follows:

- *Periodic coordination between the heads of quality in Catalan universities, the faculties/schools and programmes being reviewed and the competent government department with jurisdiction over universities, in meetings where issues of methodology and procedure are presented and discussed. Meetings are held with the heads (vice-rectors) of quality assurance and also academic governance, teaching staff, research and/or doctoral programmes; the heads of the universities' quality units; and the Catalan authorities, in particular the Directorate General for Universities.*

- *Consultation with the AQU Student Commission*
- *Validation of the consistency of the methodology and approval of the procedures, criteria and methodologies by the CAQ. For the quality assurance of teaching staff, the procedures and criteria are endorsed by the CLiC and CAR commissions.*
- *The setting up of voluntary pilot and experimental programmes to test the consistency of new proposed methodologies, for example the Experimental monitoring program*
- *Supervision of the activities undertaken by the Agency by the Board of Management.*

AQU Catalunya publishes its criteria and procedures on its website.

## **Analysis**

AQU Catalunya invests a lot of effort to build up and maintain an intensive communication with stakeholders and universities e.g. via regular meetings and workshops. The extent to which AQU Catalunya involves representatives of universities in their work is impressive. AQU Catalunya publishes descriptions of its methods and procedures as well as reports on its website. The Panel found the website easy to navigate.

## **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 2.2.

### **2.3 Criteria for decisions**

#### **STANDARD:**

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

## **Evidence**

AQU Catalunya has developed specific guidelines for the VSMA Framework and the Audit Programme, which are approved by the CAQ and published on the website.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The documents are: "Audit Programme – Guide for assessing the design of the internal quality assurance system for university education (document 04)" and "Framework for the ex-ante assessment, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised degrees" July 2010.

## **Analysis**

The procedures and criteria of the VSMA Framework are published on the AQU Catalunya website. Interviews with staff and members of the CAQ demonstrated to the Panel that the criteria are interpreted in a consistent manner. In order to achieve consistency of decisions, every committee is assisted by an AQU Catalunya staff member who is the link to the rest of the agency. The internal information system AQU Catalunya uses is comprehensive, including information on all decisions made, and readily and regularly used by all staff. The 'commissions' include the chairs of all the subject committees, to facilitate consistency of decision-making.

AQU's reports are sent in draft for comments to universities before they are confirmed and published.

## **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 2.3.

### **2.4 Processes fit for purpose**

#### **STANDARD:**

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance. Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts;
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;
- the use of international experts;
- participation of students;
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality

## **Evidence**

Review panels within the VSMA Framework e.g. to carry out ex-ante assessments of study programmes and the Audit programme are usually made up of five experts, two of whom are 'leading' academics, often working outside Catalonia, plus a member with a professional or industry background, a student and one 'expert in quality assurance', who is usually an Agency staff member, and who acts as secretary to the panel. Members of panels are selected on the basis of criteria pre-defined by CAQ.<sup>9</sup>

To brief experts, AQU Catalunya provides material on the website and uses a blended training model, the first part of which is distance learning based, and the second face-to-face. Training is based on case studies derived from extant reports.<sup>10</sup>

## **Analysis**

The processes in the VSMA Framework for validation, monitoring and accreditation of study programmes and the institutional audit are generally well-structured and oriented towards their objectives. Although the processes are not fully implemented at present, their *design* meets ESG requirements with respect to fitness for purpose and the use of the 'self-evaluation-report, site visit, draft report, published report, follow-up' model. The use of templates for the reports seems helpful in providing evidence. However the requirement to monitor every study programme on an annual basis seems unduly burdensome, not only for HEIs but also for AQU Catalunya itself. The Panel is also concerned that the workload will be unmanageable when, in due course, accreditations with site-visits are added to the requirements of validation and monitoring. This matter is more pressing at a time of economic stringency.

AQU Catalunya selects experts carefully. It appeared to the Panel that the experts are well qualified, and well briefed and trained by the agency. Due to the reliance on documentary evidence in the validating and monitoring procedures, and to the significance of national regulations, AQU Catalunya considers it problematic to use experts from outside Spain in these areas. The Panel acknowledges these difficulties, but recommends strongly that AQU Catalunya should try to use international experts for site visits, when the accreditation

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<sup>9</sup> Self-evaluation report p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Self-evaluation report p. 34.

procedure gets under way. This could also help strengthen internationalization in Catalan universities.

The involvement of students in the work of AQU Catalunya meets the requirements of ESG, as students are members of review panels and commissions. Members of the AQU Student Commission were very positive about their experience of working with AQU Catalunya. The Panel commends the way AQU Catalunya works with Catalan universities to provide joint workshops and seminars about quality assurance, which provide opportunities to engage new student experts.

University staff involved with AQU Catalunya as experts, or as members of internal quality assurance units confirmed their conviction that the improvement of Catalan universities constitutes the orientation and motivation for the AQU's work. Despite its demands, university staff considered that the monitoring process encourages institutional improvement.

## **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 2.4.

### **2.5 Reporting**

#### **STANDARD:**

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone. In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers. Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

## **Evidence**

The reports of the Audit Programme and the VSMA Framework are available on the website, mainly in Spanish and Catalan.

## **Analysis**

Reports with positive decisions may be found on the AQU Catalunya website. Staff members of internal university Quality Assurance Units suggested that they sometimes had to 'interpret' the reports for academic colleagues, though they considered that the quality of the texts has improved. The members of the AQU Students' Commission felt that the reports are not 'student-friendly'. However, the Panel's Spanish speakers considered that the reports in Spanish were well structured, written in a clear style, and included all aspects relevant to ESG 2.5. Nonetheless, the Agency should consider how to make reports as comprehensible as possible to non-experts and provide more translations.

## **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 2.5.

### **2.6 Follow-up procedures**

#### **STANDARD:**

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

## **Evidence**

Monitoring requires all programmes to produce annual progress reports including qualitative and quantitative indicators. In addition, validation of new programme proposals can include recommendations to be reported on at monitoring, or be dependent on conditions to be fulfilled, in some cases before commencement.<sup>11</sup>

## **Analysis**

The monitoring process appears to constitute an adequate follow-up procedure for the purposes of ESG. The form for the annual progress report in the VSMA framework includes numerous indicators about the development of pro-

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<sup>11</sup> "Framework for the ex-ante assessment, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised degrees" July 2010 pp. 10-11.

grammes. In addition, action plans for the quality enhancement of programmes are required. The staff members of institutional QA Units interviewed considered the procedure effective in encouraging improvement.

However, AQU Catalunya assesses only a sample of the annual monitoring reports, some selected according pre-established criteria, and some randomly . It therefore cannot be guaranteed that all recommendations are considered, or that AQU Catalunya has checked what has been done in all cases. Given that 'conditions' are specifically followed up, that 'recommendations' are not mandatory, and that the monitoring procedure seems very demanding as it stands, this omission does not seem sufficient to undermine AQU's claim to full compliance with ESG under this head; but the Panel recommends that a report about universities' implementation of recommendations should be included in the accreditation and re-accreditation process.

There is an internal discussion at AQU Catalunya about the frequency of monitoring, and the Panel encourages this debate. However the matter should be determined promptly to preserve the confidence of universities in AQU Catalunya operations.

## **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 2.6.

### **2.7 Periodic reviews**

#### **STANDARD:**

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not "once in a lifetime". It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

## **Evidence**

In the guidelines of the VSMA Framework the length of a cycle is defined as follows:

*...programmes of study are accredited for a period of six years, for Bachelor's and doctoral programmes, and four years in the case of Master's programmes.*

*Both the duration of these cycles, which are laid down by legal regulations, and the review procedures are public and take into account advances made in previous reviews.<sup>12</sup>*

## **Analysis**

The design of the VSMA Framework includes clearly defined review cycles. Although AQU Catalunya has not completed the cycle, it is evident to the Panel that the activities of accreditation and re-accreditation of programmes are intended to be on a cyclical basis. Given that the first cycle is not yet complete, it is not possible to judge whether AQU Catalunya will improve the next cycle on basis of the lessons learned from this one. However, the way in which the voluntary Audit programme worked showed that AQU Catalunya is a 'learning organisation' with the capacity and the will to review its operations and improve them in the light of experience.

## **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 2.7.

### **2.8 System-wide analyses**

#### **STANDARD:**

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

## **Evidence**

In 2011, AQU Catalunya carried out the fourth study of the labour market outcomes of graduates from all Catalan universities (2001, 2005, 2008 and 2011). The study was based on a sample of 16,182 of a total population of 28,616 graduates who completed their studies at the end of the 2006-2007 academic year.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, AQU Catalunya has developed a website for data about Catalan universities including entrance grades, number of places offered, student

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<sup>12</sup> Self-evaluation report p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Self-evaluation report p. 18.

achievement, etc. The objective was to have all necessary indicators available, on the basis of which university authorities might produce their own progress reports and compare the data for their programmes with others offered in Catalonia. In this project AQU Catalunya co-operates with the Catalan government and the Catalan universities.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, AQU Catalunya has promoted in recent years studies on specific areas of higher education in Catalonia. In particular, studies have been carried out on academic achievement, the student drop out rate, and the perceptions and points of view of students. One of the more recent studies in this field was an analysis of the curriculum pathways of university teaching staff based on CVs submitted for the various academic staff assessment programmes undertaken by AQU Catalunya.<sup>15</sup>

### **Analysis**

The panel commends the number and diversity of studies and surveys AQU has undertaken in the last years and has published on its website.

### **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 2.8.

#### **3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education**

##### **STANDARD:**

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

##### **GUIDELINES:**

The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions. The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

### **Evidence**

Standard 3.1 includes the whole part 2 of ESG.

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<sup>14</sup> Self-evaluation report p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Self-evaluation report p. 18.

## **Analysis**

AQU Catalunya complies fully with ESG 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8.

AQU Catalunya complies substantially with ESG 2.1.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the Review Panel concludes that AQU Catalunya complies fully with ESG 3.1.

### **3.3 Activities**

#### **STANDARD:**

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

## **Evidence**

The self-evaluation report lists at p. 37 following activities in the last 15 years:

In the case of institutional review, the following programmes:

*“Library services (1999 and 2007), Assessment of merits in teaching (2003-present day), AUDIT (2007-present day) and Affiliated institutions (2008-2010).*

*In the case of programme review, with regard to pre-Bologna qualifications, the PRO-QU (1996-2006) and VIRTUAL (2007-2008) programmes, and to test the conformity of qualifications adapted and aligned to comply with EHEA guidelines, the Pilot Plan (review 2004-2006 and certification 2008-2009).*

*Lastly, in the case of qualifications (post-Bologna) fully aligned with the EHEA, the Recognized Postgraduate Programmes (2006-2008) and the VSMA Framework (2010-present day).”*

## **Analysis**

The panel commends the list of activities AQU Catalunya has undertaken since the foundation of the agency. These activities will be consolidated by the implementation of the VSMA Framework activities.

## **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 3.3.

## 4.2 ESG 3.2: Official Status

### 3.2 Official status

#### STANDARD:

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

#### Evidence

Tasks, structure and functions of AQU Catalunya are laid down in the Catalan Universities Act. The AQU Catalunya Bill is pending legislation and this will further consolidate the Agency's statutory position.<sup>16</sup>

#### Analysis

AQU Catalunya is recognized by the competent authority and has an established legal basis.

#### Conclusion

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 3.2.

## 4.3 ESG 3.4 Resources

### 3.4 Resources

#### STANDARD:

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

#### Evidence

The annual budget of AQU Catalunya in 2011 was EUR 3.1 million, which comes mostly from the Government of Catalonia. AQU Catalunya also receives revenue from national and international projects and assessment fees from the academic staff evaluation programme.

In 2011, the staff consisted in forty-three members, 26 with permanent contracts.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Art. 1 AQU Catalunya Bill, non-revised translation.

<sup>17</sup> Annual Report 2011 p. 39

The Agency has a policy and plan for internal training programmes, 2011-2015.

### **Analysis**

The panel considered that AQU Catalunya has adequate resources in financial and human terms. With the translation of strategic, mid-term objectives into annual work plans, AQU Catalunya has developed a good facility for scheduling, which is likely to encourage optimum use of resources. Unfortunately, due to the economic crisis, the budget of AQU Catalunya has been reduced by 10%, which has led to salary cuts and postponing some projects. Although this is a challenging situation, the Panel was impressed by the constructive attitude with which AQU Catalunya staff confronted it. Communication between management and staff on these matters seemed free and full.

The Panel gained the impression that AQU Catalunya staff members are motivated and professional. University representatives considered their AQU Catalunya contacts competent and service-orientated. Members of commissions and committees consider themselves important in AQU Catalunya and feel well integrated.

Accommodation and IT facilities are appropriate to enable the staff to fulfill their responsibilities. The Panel noted well-functioning IT for internal and external communication and the ready exchange of information.

As discussed above in relation ESG 2.4, the panel considers the process of monitoring in the VSMA framework burdensome, and that it is a good candidate for rationalization at a time when resources are unlikely to increase.

### **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 3.4.

## 4.4 ESG 3.5: Mission statement

### 3.5 Mission statement

#### STANDARD:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

#### GUIDELINES:

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

### Evidence

In the Agency's Strategic Plan 2009-2012, which was endorsed by the Board of Management, the Agency's mission is defined as follows:

*"The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) is a public entity with an internationally recognized status. Its mission is to assure the quality of higher education through compliance with the European standards of quality and to safeguard of the interests of society in the quality of higher education.*

*Its activity is developed through:*

- *Analytical external quality assurance processes (review and accreditation)*
- *International benchmarks and an innovation-based perspective*
- *Transparency and publicity mechanisms*
- *The involvement of the educational community and social stakeholders*
- *Competent people who are motivated and satisfied with the work carried out by AQU Catalunya*
- *Respect for the values defined below.*

In addition, the Strategic Plan defines also values and objectives in strategic and operational matters. The details of the Strategic Plan are set out in the annual Activities Plan, which is also endorsed by the Agency's Board of Management.

### Analysis

The mission and objectives laid down in the strategic plan take into account all relevant aspects of the ESG. The Panel considers the strategic goals to be clearly described and translated into realisable annual action plans.

### Conclusion

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 3.5.

## 4.5 ESG 3.6: Independence

### 3.6 Independence

#### STANDARD:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

#### GUIDELINES:

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as

- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

### Evidence

The independence of AQU Catalunya is specified in different articles of the Catalan Universities Act. In the preamble it states that the Act wishes to ensure that AQU has: *"principles of independence, professionalism and freedom to operate ... as in equivalent European agencies."*

In Art. 148 is stated:

*"1. Evaluation committees, which shall act with technical independence, shall approve the evaluations of the Agency for their respective areas and shall ultimately be responsible for these evaluations.*

*2. Evaluations and accreditations issued by other evaluation agencies or bodies in matters falling within the area of responsibility of the Catalan University System Quality Agency may be taken into consideration by the latter for the purposes established by this Law."*

The independence of the 'Commissions' of AQU Catalunya is also addressed in other articles of the Statues. The internal quality system and an ethical code are designed to guarantee the theoretical and practical independence of the commissions. In addition, Art. 17.5 states that the commissions work independently, approve the evaluations carried out by the Agency in their respective areas, and are independently liable for the final results.

As laid down in the Catalan Universities Act, the following persons are appointed or nominated by the regional Catalan government: the President of the Agency (Art. 141), the Director (Art. 143) and the presidents of CLIC and CAR (Art. 145, 146).

## **Analysis**

The Panel considered that AQU Catalunya is independent, and identified no indication of external influence or manipulation in respect of the judgements of the Board of Management or the commissions. Furthermore, the committees of the commissions are independent in their academic decision-making.

However, some aspects of the current situation could undermine the present practical independence of key roles and functions in the Agency. In the VSMA Framework, the Spanish ministry with jurisdiction over universities has a controlling influence, under the present legal arrangements. In relation to the demands of validation, for instance, AQU Catalunya and the other regional Spanish agencies act more as subcontractors, the requirements and software used to respond to the requirements being determined by the ministry. The Board of AQU Catalunya itself has complained in a public statement about bureaucratic burden of the validation processes.<sup>18</sup>

The Panel considers that, at present, too many senior appointments are made by government fully to meet the requirements of ESG 3.6. These appointments include the President, the Director and the presidents of both CLiC and CAR. The proposed AQU Catalunya Bill will not change these arrangements. It is good that the new bill provides for broader composition of the Board of Management: while the current composition includes mainly rectors of the Catalan universities and two representatives from the competent ministry, the new Board includes two students and two persons representing Catalan society. The Panel sees no good reason why a properly constituted Board of Management should not be trusted to appoint its own President, Director and commission presidents.

## **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya substantially complies with ESG 3.6.

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<sup>18</sup> [http://www.aqu.cat/aqu/actualitat/noticies/35003578\\_en.html](http://www.aqu.cat/aqu/actualitat/noticies/35003578_en.html)

## **4.6 ESG 3.7: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies**

### **3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies**

#### **STANDARD:**

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

#### **GUIDELINES:**

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.

Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

#### **Evidence**

The descriptions and criteria of the QA processes of AQU Catalunya are available on the website. The Accreditation and Audit procedures include a self-evaluation, a site visit by a group of experts and a report. Comments on the form of report and follow-up procedures may be found above, in relation to ESG 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6.

In 2010, AQU Catalunya established a student commission to advise on projects with a direct impact on students and to participate in studies of interest to the student body. Students are also members of review panels and committees (see ESG 2.4)

As stated on AQU's website, the universities have one month from the time of notification to appeal against the outcome of a validation process. Appeals must be made to the chair of the Universities Council. If leave to appeal is granted, it must be referred to AQU Catalunya within three months. The claim is assessed by the AQU Quality Assurance Commission (CAQ), which must report back to the Universities Council within one month. Assessment of the appeal is based exclusively on the university's programme specification and the

documentation enclosed in the dossier. No other information is taken into account, save possible clarifications.<sup>19</sup> In the proposed AQU Catalunya Bill, regulations are included for an Appeals Commission. The commission will consist of five members (one member of the AQU Board of Management and four external members).<sup>20</sup>

## **Analysis**

As stated above in relation to ESG 2.4, the Panel believes that AQU Catalunya has proper procedures for the selection of competent experts for assessments. AQU Catalunya also practises the four steps identified by ESG: a self-assessment, review by experts including students, publication of report and a follow-up procedure. Although the Panel reiterates some concerns regarding the follow-up procedure for validation under ESG 2.4, in general the demands of ESG are met. Published results are readily found on the website.

Regarding the appeals procedure, the panel noticed that the Catalan Universities Act includes an internal appeals procedure in which one commission acts as an 'appeals committee' in the case of an appeal against the decision of another. The arrangement for appeal against a validation decision is described on the AQU website. In the voluntarily Audit programme an appeal procedure was not necessary due to the absence of legal consequences. The Panel welcomes the implementation of a separate appeal commission under the new AQU Catalunya Bill.

Comments on the consistency of AQU Catalunya decisions may be found above, in relation to ESG 2.3.

## **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 3.7.

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.aqu.cat/universitats/verificacio/index\\_en.html](http://www.aqu.cat/universitats/verificacio/index_en.html)

<sup>20</sup> Art. 14 AQU Catalunya Bill, non-revised translation.

## 4.7 ESG 3.8 Accountability procedures

### 3.8 Accountability procedures

#### STANDARD:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

#### GUIDELINES:

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;
2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
  - the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
  - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
  - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are sub-contracted to other parties;
  - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

### Evidence

AQU Catalunya introduced an ISO 9001-based internal QA system in 2000. The system has recently been successfully reviewed internally and externally. The internal management system consists of a handbook and a series of procedures that is regularly updated by the Quality and Information Security Committee and the Agency's internal QA unit.

In 2011, the Board endorsed a quality and security policy, which is available on the website. Besides commitments on internal quality assurance the policy includes objectives for information security and personal data protection. The "Code of Ethics", which includes statements on independence for all members of AQU Catalunya (experts, bodies and staff), is also published on the website.

According to p. 57 of the self-evaluation report, all members and collaborators of AQU Catalunya have to act in conformity with its "Code of Ethics" and according to its no-conflict-of-interest policy.

AQU Catalunya does not engage subcontractors for QA procedures.

The latest external review of the Agency took place in 2007 and led to the re-confirmation of full membership of ENQA.

### **Analysis**

For the last 12 years, AQU Catalunya has used an internal quality assurance system based on ISO 9001 which has been regularly re-certified. The handbook for quality assurance contains adequate procedures and feedback mechanisms e.g. satisfaction surveys and opportunities for users to communicate their complaints via the website. By talking with the staff of AQU Catalunya, the panel was convinced that these tools for internal quality assurance have become a natural part of daily work.

AQU Catalunya is sensible to all influences which could threaten independence and fairness of judgement. The "Code of Ethics" on the website is comprehensive. A no-conflict-of-no-interest clause is included in the contracts of experts. AQU Catalunya has met the requirements for cyclical external review by virtue of its reviews for reconfirmation of ENQA membership.

### **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ESG 3.8.

## **4.8 ENQA membership Criterion 8: Miscellaneous**

### **ENQA criterion 8 - Miscellaneous**

- i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgments and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups
- ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.
- iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

### **Evidence**

AQU Catalunya has developed specific guidelines for the VSMA Framework and the Audit Programme, which are approved by the CAQ and published on the

website.<sup>21</sup> Arrangements to ensure consistency of decisions are described above, in relation to ESG 2.3.

Arrangements for university checks on draft reports and for appeals against decisions of the Agency are described above, in relation to ESG 3.7. As indicated there, the new AQU Catalunya Bill will considerably strengthen appeals arrangements.

AQU's consistent engagement with quality assurance in Europe and beyond is described under 'Main functions of AQU Catalunya' above.

### **Analysis**

Analysis of AQU Catalunya activities is offered above, in relation to consistency of decisions (ESG 2.3), appeals (3.7) and contributions to the activities of ENQA ('Main functions of AQU Catalunya', ESG 3.3). The Panel considered that in all three matters AQU Catalunya met the requirements of ESG and ENQA membership.

### **Conclusion**

AQU Catalunya fully complies with ENQA membership Criterion 8.

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<sup>21</sup> The documents are: "Audit Programme – Guide for assessing the design of the internal quality assurance system for university education (document 04)" and „Framework for the ex-ante assessment, monitoring, modification and accreditation of recognised degrees" July 2010.

## **5. Any sections relating to additional Terms of Reference of the review or additional relevant documentation not covered by the ENQA membership criteria/ESG**

### **5.1 AQU's academic staff evaluation Programme**

In the Terms of Reference AQU Catalunya asks also for feedback on the programme of assessment of academic staff, although this is not a quality assurance activity required by ESG. This arrangement is unique to Spain.

On the basis of the interviews at the site visit, the Panel concluded that the staff responsible for managing the procedures and the commissions responsible for making judgements work effectively and according to pre-established and publicly available assessment criteria. CLiC and CAR have similar duties: CLiC assesses applicants of tenure-track lecturers and collaborating staff positions, and CAR deals with academics who wish to become tenured assistant or full professors in Catalan universities. However, while CLiC makes some reference to teaching abilities, CAR focuses wholly on research strength. Though the Panel understood that this is a conventional distinction, and that it is usual for professorial appointment to be mostly dependent on research record, CAR's focus is exclusive, to a degree that is unusual in other European countries. This is bound to convey the message that teaching is relatively unimportant to Catalonian staff considering career development, and does not sit well with AQU's general attitude towards the improvement of learning opportunities for students. CAR is fairly closely constrained by its terms of reference, but is able to propose developments in how it carries out its assessments, and the Review Panel considers that the Commission should consider how some reference to teaching strength may be brought into assessments for professorial position.

The Review Panel noted (contrary to the findings of the 2007 review) that members of CLiC and CAR considered themselves part of AQU Catalunya, and identified with the objectives of the Agency.

To help universities evaluate their teaching, AQU Catalunya supports the so-called "Docentia" Framework, which was established by the national Spanish agency (ANECA). The program aims to provide HEIs with activities and procedures that ensure teaching quality and foster teachers' development, recogni-

tion and reward. Well-structured and proportionate procedures and criteria for assessment are published on the AQU website.

Due to the large number of applications, teaching assessment consumes a lot of financial and personal resources. The division of tasks and commissions seem to be more developed from historic reasons rather than from logic.

In AQU Catalunya the "Docentia" Programme falls under the responsibilities of CAQ, and has no connection with either CLiC or CAR. It appeared to the Panel that the "Docentia" programme is valued and valuable. It could provide a link between the activities of CLiC and CAR and help to close the loop back to every day teaching, providing the Agency with an even better picture of teaching and learning of Catalan universities. The Agency has opportunities with the passage of the AQU Catalunya Bill and the proposed merger of CLiC and CAR to achieve more synergy and cooperation in its internal activities. It should pay particular attention to the ways in which the functions now carried out by CLiC and CAR and within the "Docentia" programme may be brought more closely together.

The internal appeals procedure for the teaching staff assessment is laid down in Catalan Law and, according to AQU Catalunya staff, in use. As stated on the website an appeal resulting from disagreement with a decision can be submitted to the CLiC or CAR Commission up to one month from the date of receipt of the postal notification or publication of the edict in the Official Journal of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia (DOGC). The maximum period for the appeal to be resolved is three months from the time of submission. In order to obtain more transparency and consistency, the Panel recommends introducing one single appeal procedure for every decision of AQU Catalunya.

## **6. Conclusion and development**

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence, the Review Panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, AQU Catalunya is in compliance with the *ENQA Membership Provisions*. The Panel therefore recommends to the Board of ENQA that AQU Catalunya should have Full Membership of ENQA confirmed for a further period of five years.

### **6.1 Recommendations**

To improve the work of AQU Catalunya the panel makes the following recommendations:

- The form and demands of the progress report in the VSMA Framework should be more closely focussed on ESG Part 1. (ESG 2.1)
- In the arrangements that apply under the new law, AQU should continue to focus on the internal quality management of HEIs, which was a feature of the Audit programme. (ESG 2.1).
- AQU should try to use international experts for site visits, when the accreditation procedure gets under way. (ESG 2.4)
- AQU should consider how to make reports as comprehensible as possible to non-experts. (ESG 2.5)
- A report about universities' implementation of recommendations should be included in the process of (re-)accreditation. (ESG 2.6)
- There is an internal discussion at AQU about the frequency of monitoring, and the Panel encourages this debate. However the matter should be determined promptly to preserve the confidence of universities in AQU operations. (ESG 2.6)
- AQU should plan carefully for staffing demands when all four elements of the Framework (including Accreditation) come into play. (ESG 3.4)
- AQU should consider how some reference to teaching abilities may be brought into assessments for professorial position. (Academic Staff Evaluation Programme)

- AQU should pay particular attention to the ways in which the functions now carried out by CLiC and CAR and within the “Docentia” programme may be brought more closely together. (Academic Staff Evaluation Programme)

## Annexes

### Annex 1 – Membership Provisions

#### CHAPTER I. CRITERIA FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP

Comment: the Board recommended at its meeting of 11 June 2008 that this first chapter of the membership provisions should incorporate more clearly the ESG. As a result, the membership criteria are now identical to the text of the ESG. The parts highlighted in blue are additional to the ESG and were already mentioned in the version of 28 March 2008.

Full Membership of ENQA is open to quality assurance agencies in the field of higher education from EHEA member states that have been operating and conducting actual evaluation activities for at least two years.

Before being accepted as a Full Member, an applicant agency must satisfy the Board that it meets the eight criteria, listed below. The applicant agency will thereby also meet the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as adopted by the European Ministers in charge of higher education in Bergen in 2005. The Board may modify the details of the procedures at its discretion.

Each criterion is followed by guidelines (in *italics*) which provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the criteria. Although the guidelines are not part of the criteria themselves, the criteria should be considered in conjunction with them.

#### **ENQA Criterion 1– Activities (ESG 3.1, 3.3)**

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis. The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines<sup>22</sup>.

*The external quality assurance activities may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the member.*

#### **ENQA Criterion 2 – Official status (ESG 3.2)**

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should

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<sup>22</sup> Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ISBN 952-5539-04-0, Helsinki: ENQA, 2005.

comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

### **ENQA Criterion 3 – Resources (ESG 3.4)**

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes, procedures and staff.

### **ENQA Criterion 4 – Mission statement (ESG 3.5)**

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

*This statement should describe the goals and objectives of the member's quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of its work. The statement should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the member and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statement is translated into a clear policy and management plan.*

### **ENQA Criterion 5 – Independence (ESG 3.6)**

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

*An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:*

- *its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);*
- *the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;*
- *while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.*

### **ENQA Criterion 6 – External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members (ESG 3.7)**

- i. The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available.
- ii. These processes will normally be expected to include:
  - a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
  - an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
  - publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
  - a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

*Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.*

### **ENQA Criterion 7 – Accountability procedures (ESG 3.8)**

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

*These procedures are expected to include the following:*

- i. *a published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;*
- ii. *documentation which demonstrates that:*
  - *the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;*
  - *the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts, Committee/Council/Board and staff members;*
  - *the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some*

*or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;*

- *the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. a means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.*
- iii. a mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years which includes a report on its conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.*

### **ENQA criterion 8 - Miscellaneous**

- i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgements and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups
- ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.
- iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

## External review of AQU Catalunya

29.05.2012

### Site Visit from 29.-30.05.2012

#### Review panel:

- Prof David Timms, former Deputy Vice Chancellor, Bath Spa University and Higher Education Consultant, UK – *CHAIR*
- Agnes Leinweber, German Accreditation Council (GAC), Germany – *SECRETARY*
- Teresa Sanchez, Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (CTI), France
- Tia Loukkola, European University Association (EUA), Belgium
- Nadja Kiiskinen, University of Tampere, Finland

#### Hotel for review panel:

H10 Montcada, Via Laietana, 24, 08003 Barcelona

#### Location for sessions:

AQU Catalunya, Via Laietana, 28, 08003 Barcelona

28.05.2012		
16:00 – 20:00	Private Meeting of review panel for preparation	Room Laietana in Hotel H 10 Montcada
20.00	Private Dinner	Restaurant El Pintor, Sant Honorat, 7

29.05.2012			
1.	09:00 – 10:00	Head of AQU	Director, heads of sections <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Josep-Anton Ferré</b>, <i>Director</i></li><li>▪ <b>Àngel Jiménez</b>, <i>Manager</i></li><li>▪ <b>Josep Grifoll</b>, <i>Head of Quality Assessment department</i></li><li>▪ <b>Josep-Manel Torres</b>, <i>Coordinator of Quality Assessment department</i></li><li>▪ <b>Maria Giné</b>, <i>Head of Planning</i></li></ul>

			<p><i>and Communication unit</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Carme Pérez</b>, <i>Head of Administration unit</i></li> <li>▪ <b>David Gassiot</b>, <i>Head of the IT unit</i></li> </ul>
2.	10:00 – 11:00	Representatives of Board of Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Joaquim Prats</b>, <i>President AQU Catalunya</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Dídac Ramírez</b>, <i>rector UB</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Josep-Joan Moreso</b>, <i>rector UPF</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Roberto Fernández</b>, <i>rector UdL</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Jordi Montaña</b>, <i>rector UVic</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Albert Bou</b>, <i>chairman of the Council UdG</i></li> </ul>
		<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	
3.	11:15 – 12:15	Experts from programme and institutional reviews by AQU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Flor Sánchez</b>, <i>programme review</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Xavier Garcia</b>, <i>affiliated institutions review</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Vicent Salvador</b>, <i>programme review</i></li> </ul>
	12:15 - 13:00	Review panel discussion with lunch	
4.	13:00 – 14:30	Representatives from Collaborating and Tenure-Track Teaching Staff Commission (CLIC) (including some heads of specific committees) and representatives from Research Assessment Commission (CAR) (including some heads of specific committees)	<p><b>CAR:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Joan Rodés</b>, <i>president CAR</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Teresa Espinal</b>, <i>president Specific Committee for Humanities</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Roser González</b>, <i>president Specific Committee for Life Sciences</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Joaquim Casal</b>, <i>president Specific Committee for Engineering and Architecture</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Jaume Vilarrassa</b>, <i>member Specific Committee for Sciences</i></li> </ul> <p><b>CLiC:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>M. Lluïsa Hernanz</b>, <i>president CLiC</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Jacint Jordana</b>, <i>member Specific Committee for Social Sciences</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Carme Muñoz</b>, <i>member Specific Committee for Humanities</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Germà Bel</b>, <i>member Specific Committee for Social Sciences</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Jordi Garcia</b>, <i>member Specific Committee for Sciences</i></li> <li>▪ <b>Miquel Oliver</b>, <i>member Spe-</i></li> </ul>

			<i>cific Committee for Engineering and Architecture</i>
		<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	
5.	14:45 – 15:30	Representatives of AQU student commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Gemma Espigares</b>, UdL</li> <li>▪ <b>David Molina Moya</b>, UPF</li> <li>▪ <b>Alfonso Martín</b>, URL</li> <li>▪ <b>Gloria Perona</b>, UPC</li> </ul>
		<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	
6.	15:45– 16:45	Representatives from Quality Assessment Commission (CAQ) (including heads of specific committees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Josep-Anton Ferré</b>, president CAQ</li> <li>▪ <b>Xavier Correig</b>, president Specific committee for Engineering and Architecture</li> <li>▪ <b>Francisco M. López-Palomeque</b>, president Specific committee for Arts and Humanities</li> <li>▪ <b>Jordi Suriñach</b>, member Specific committee for Social Sciences and Law</li> <li>▪ <b>Juan Nuño</b>, member Specific committee for Sciences</li> <li>▪ <b>Pere Botella</b>, member Specific committee for Engineering and Architecture</li> </ul>
		<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	
7.	17:00-17:45	Representatives of QA Units of universities, audited by AQU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Montserrat Peregrina</b>, UAB</li> <li>▪ <b>Meritxell Chaves</b>, UPC</li> <li>▪ <b>Mireia Agustí</b>, UdG</li> <li>▪ <b>Ariadna Barberà</b>, URL</li> </ul>
	17:45 – 19:00	Review panel meeting to summarize outcomes of day one	
	19:30	Dinner	Review panel only

		<b>30.05.2012</b>	
8.	09:00 – 10:00	Meeting with AQU staff	<p>Some representatives from each department, including responsible person for internal quality assurance, <b>not including</b> heads of sections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Jordi Escolar</b>, legal advisor</li> <li>▪ <b>Núria Comet</b>, project manager and head of internal quality assurance</li> <li>▪ <b>Anna Prades</b>, project manager Quality Assessment Department</li> <li>▪ <b>Esther Huertas</b>, project manager Quality Assessment Department</li> <li>▪ <b>Albert Basart</b>, project manager Quality Assessment Department</li> <li>▪ <b>Núria Márquez</b>, technician and coordinator in teaching staff assessment</li> <li>▪ <b>Eva Eixarch</b>, technician in teaching staff assessment</li> <li>▪ <b>Concepción Herruzo</b>, communication editor</li> <li>▪ <b>Maribel Quirós</b>, information systems</li> <li>▪ <b>Sònia Parellada</b>, human resources</li> </ul>
		<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	
9.	10:15 – 11:00	Representatives of ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Lluís Jofre</b>, General Director of Universities</li> </ul>
10.	11:00 – 12:00	If questions remain: Meeting with Director or other representatives of AQU Management or tour through AQU offices and premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Esteve Arboix</b>, Head of Teaching Staff Assessment department</li> <li>▪ <b>Núria Márquez</b>, technician and coordinator in teaching staff assessment</li> <li>▪ <b>Eva Eixarch</b>, technician in teaching staff assessment</li> </ul>

	12:00 - 15:00	Final discussion of review panel to agree outcomes and to discuss main lines of the report with lunch	
11.	15:00	Final meeting with AQU Management	President, Director
	15:15	Departure	