

Aragon Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ACPUA)  
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Bern, 2 January 2019

**Subject: follow-up report to the 2016 ENQA review**

Dear Mr. Antonio Serrano González,

At its meeting on 13 December 2018, the Board of ENQA considered the follow-up report arising from the external review of Aragon Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation in 2016.

The Board approves the report and acknowledges the progress that has been made.

Yours sincerely,



Christoph Grolimund  
President

## **European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) follow-up visit to ACPUA, Aragon, Spain**

### **Panel report**

#### **Introduction**

ACPUA (in full) underwent its first ENQA review in February 2016. The report on the review led to ACPUA's success in becoming a member of ENQA and also in being listed on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

#### **Follow-up: purpose and conduct of the visit**

In 2016, ENQA introduced the follow-up element to its review process, with a view to providing an enhancement focus on the action plan and any changes to the reviewed Agency. The process is a voluntary one. ACPUA signalled its intention to participate in a follow-up process and thus became the first member Agency of ENQA to undertake this part of the review process.

The chair (Fiona Crozier, QAA UK) and secretary (Pedro Teixeira, University of Porto, Portugal) of the original review panel revisited the Agency in March 2018. In advance of the visit, they agreed that the focus of the event would be one of enhancement, aimed at assisting ACPUA to take stock of the actions it had taken so far, following the review, and at allowing the Agency to look forward to its next review by ENQA in 2021.

ACPUA, with the full agreement of the panel chair and secretary, took responsibility for the programme for the visit, though the Panel has provided regular feedback on its structure, content, and invitees. The visit began with the Agency's analysis of the usefulness of the original ENQA review report and consisted of meetings with Agency's staff and external stakeholders, some of whom had met the panel before.

#### **Findings**

Through the visit and the discussions, the panel gained a clear sense of the progress made by the Agency against recommendations and of the high level of attention to the details contained in the review report. It was apparent that ACPUA had worked extremely hard to take into account the recommendations made and also to focus on how those recommendations might lead to improvement rather than merely provide an exercise in 'box-ticking.'

The review report had been received very positively and was regarded by ACPUA as being very useful. The aspects that were particularly appreciated were the realistic tone of the report that tried to instill in the work of the Agency a careful monitoring of the growth of activities and its consequences for sustainability, as well as the need to strengthen its resources to sustain that envisaged growth. Hence, the Agency reported that the report has been widely used over the last two years. There has been a visible increase in the financial and human resources allocated to the Agency, sustained by a growing and broad political support at the regional level for the role of the Agency. This may also be observed in the likely allocation of additional responsibilities to the Agency regarding research, though this is still under discussion among policy-makers.

The panel offered further support in the following areas:

### *Purposes of QA*

As in many other parts of Europe, in Spain there is a growing move from accountability to enhancement in the purposes underlying quality assurance. By July of 2017, the first cycle of evaluation ended and institutional evaluation has come to the forefront of discussions about accreditation in Aragon and in Spain. Furthermore, there has been some clarification of the roles of ANECA and of the regional agencies, with the former being allocated a more subsidiary role and the latter a primary role. However, these are very different evaluation processes and pose significant challenges. On the other hand, it reinforces the necessity to work with universities, something that it was already mentioned in the review report and to which ACPUA has devoted significant attention in recent years.

The interaction with universities will be very important in the growth of processes of accreditation for internal quality assurance systems in institutions and for institutional evaluation. In both cases, this will mean trying to help faculties and departments to develop a robust and attentive quality culture that may sustain the delegation of major responsibilities to them regarding the monitoring and continuous improvement of programmes.

Another important dimension of collaboration with universities is the follow-up of graduates and of their transition to the labour market and employability, an area that may be also very relevant in raising the awareness among external stakeholders about the relevance and impact of QA processes in Aragon and in Spain.

### *Multiplication of Evaluation Processes*

The growth of activities and the diversification of processes has become a relevant challenge for the Agency. On the one hand, this has been the result of successful review that has included in the Agency's activities the ex-ante review of programmes. On the other hand, there has been a significant growth in research evaluation and pressure related to the evaluation of teaching staff. Moreover, there are prospective changes with the forthcoming regional law of science that will also allocate additional tasks to ACPUA.

One of the important challenges relates to the review of postgraduate programs. Postgraduate education has been through significant changes and it is regarded as being insufficiently flexible. Thus, the Agency, together with other Spanish agencies, has been discussing how to balance the educational and research dimensions of these reviews. On the one hand, these programmes have a strong research component, especially since before the Bologna process they were mainly focused on the development on individual research projects of each student. In terms of the review process, and although some synergies may exist between processes, it also requires an adaptation of staff, reviewers, processes to new procedures and purposes.

Additionally, the Agency has been developing some work outside Aragon, as was already seen at the time of the review. This has not constituted a major commitment and it has contributed to the recognition and confidence of the Agency. Furthermore, it has also contributed to nurture the collaboration with other Agencies in Spain.

### *Preparation of the new Strategic Plan*

ACPUA has started the preparations for its forthcoming Strategic Plan. The panel considers that this document should be articulated with the annual activity plans and should set out in what way the latter monitors and analyses the extent of which the Agency is progressing according to its priorities and milestones defined in the Strategic Plan. This would also require making the Annual Plan

becomes more analytical and not merely a description of the operational activity throughout the year. This should assist the Agency to monitor its progress annually and over the period of the strategic plan.

### **Conclusions**

The panel believes that allowing the Agency to take control of the agenda and the site visit worked extremely well, allowing the focus of the event to be on the Agency's view of how and where it was improving but leaving room for discussion and input from the panel. It also mitigated against the event becoming review-focused. The panel was able to engage in dialogue with the Agency and its stakeholders.

The panel hopes that the short feedback provided in this report, as well as the visit itself, will enable ACPUA to continue working effectively to fulfil the goals set out in its action plan and to move towards effective preparation for its next ENQA review.

The panel would like to thank ACPUA for the openness and transparency with which it approached the process and wishes the Agency every success in the future.

Fiona Crozier and Pedro Teixeira

April 2018