

Mrs. Maria KELO
Director
European Association for Quality Assurance
in Higher Education (ENQA)
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1040 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

Zaragoza (Spain), 9 September 2013.

Dear Mrs. Kelo,

As I already anticipated in the email of 29th July, I am writing to you now to formally request the affiliation of this Aragon Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ACPUA) into ENQA.

The reasons that drive this request are very clear for us. Since it was started up seven years ago, this agency for the guarantee of university quality has been growing as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was implemented in the Spanish region of Aragon to which it serves. Working in close and loyal collaboration with ANECA, whenever the occasion requires so, ACPUA has operated from its area, trying to observe and closely examine the often convoluted day to day of the adaptation of the Bologna Plan and specifically its quality assurance policies. Thanks mainly to a complete follow up of the university qualifications (we have followed and visited all the degrees and always published all the reports) and of the documentation and study of the regional university system, we believe to be considered by the society of Aragon as an essential instrument for the assurance and promotion of the quality of its universities.

In order to complete the consolidation of the Agency, in the past two years, and despite living an adverse economic situation, we have made an important effort to assume new challenges (such as the evaluation of Research University Institutes) and primarily to review and improve each and all of our procedures, with the aim of fully adapting them to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

The establishment of a formal link with ENQA is for us a natural and necessary step within this improvement process. If we now also take into consideration the regulation on competences provided by the Spanish current legislation regarding the accreditation of university studies, then this step is almost decisive. I will not then conceal from you our desire of successfully overcoming in the near future the international assessment which is an essential requirement included in your Bylaws to access the status of full member. This is the unanimous feeling of our Board of Directors, the highest government board of the Agency, expressed in its last meeting held the 10th June.

Following the procedure established by you for these cases, I am pleased to inform you that our website address is acpua.aragon.es and our contact person for everything referring to our relations with you is Mrs. Ana-Isabel Ortega, quality technician of

ACPUA. Her contact details are the following: e-mail: aiortegap@aragon.es , telephone no.: +34 976 71 33 75 / +34 637 87 58 13.

Likewise, and in order to facilitate the task of examining this request for the Board of ENQA, below is some basic information of our agency:

1. ACPUA (origin and legal status). - ACPUA is the official agency for the evaluation of higher education in Aragon (Spain). It was set up in 2005 by Law of the regional Parliament. Its legal status is that of an autonomous body (public law entity), with own legal personality and its own assets and capacity to attain its objects. It performs its functions objectively, impartially and independently, recognised and guaranteed by law. It is governed by its own bylaws, approved in 2006 (Decree 239/2006, of 4 December).

ACPUA is a full member, together with ANECA and the rest of Spanish agencies, of the Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies (REACU). It is the only Spanish agency that does not yet belong to ENQA, which is a member of the national Commission for the regulation of the accreditation of university studies (CURSA). And, among other networks, it also forms part of the ministerial commission that develops the Integrated Information University System (SIIU).

2. Aragon and its university system. - Aragon, an ancient and important Reign with a long university tradition which dates as far back as the Renaissance, is today an Autonomous Community of Spain which has extensive regional competences in the field of education and university quality. The region has 1,349,467 inhabitants, a per capita GDP of €25,540 (above the Spanish average and that of the EU27) and has an exceptional geostrategic position within Spain, as it is located in the intersection of the double axis of development and wealth of Madrid, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Valencia. It also has a long border with France, which favours the cultural and economic osmosis with the regions of Aquitaine and Midi-Pyrénées.

Higher education in Aragon is imparted on-campus in two universities: one public (the University of Zaragoza) and the other private (University of San Jorge), and also has in the area several important headquarters of the National University of Distance Education (UNED). The University of Zaragoza is one of the largest, oldest and most prestigious universities in Spain and currently has 66 degrees, 48 masters, 42 doctorates, 31,196 students, 3,648 teachers and researchers and 1,957 staff. The University of San Jorge, young and growing, has 11 degrees, 9 masters, 2 doctorates, 1,501 students, 212 teachers and researchers and 86 staff.

In the past years, the level of economic and social development achieved and the teaching and research excellence attained have contributed to the official recognition of a Campus of International Excellence, named Campus Iberus and formed by the University of Zaragoza and the non-Aragon universities of La Rioja, the Public

University of Navarra, and the University of Lleida, all of them located in the strategic corridor of the Ebro valley, generator of intellectual and cultural links and synergies for centuries.

3. **Mission and vision.** - ACPUA has the aim of guaranteeing and promoting the quality of the university system of Aragon. Part of this aim is the development of useful links between the university, the social-productive fabric, the institutional decision-making bodies and the society of Aragon as a whole, as well as the promotion of the exchange of experience, not only with other national and international university systems but also with other educational levels (secondary education, vocational training, etc.).

In order to achieve this mission, ACPUA mainly develops technical assessment, certification and accreditation tasks. This activity of public service is complemented with research and prospective tasks and promotion activities for a quality education culture of higher education within the region.

Our vision at ACPUA is to be an agile and efficient agency that becomes indispensable in the area thanks to the seriousness and good operation of the activity it provides, without causing bureaucratic "overheating". By contributing the added value of the quality guarantee, we will be an essential reference for all the institutions and agents with education responsibilities in the region.

Furthermore, ACPUA is an open regional entity: it aims for the integration and interlocation with the main European and international university quality and assessment networks. We thereby aspire to become a qualified agency outside Aragon and a recognised interlocutor in the European scene on university quality and assessment.

To achieve this vision, ACPUA must abide in all its procedures and actions by the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). With transparency, independence of judgement and commitment with the accountability we sustain reflection, ongoing improvement and creativity.

4. **Agency structure.**- ACPUA is currently organised as follows:

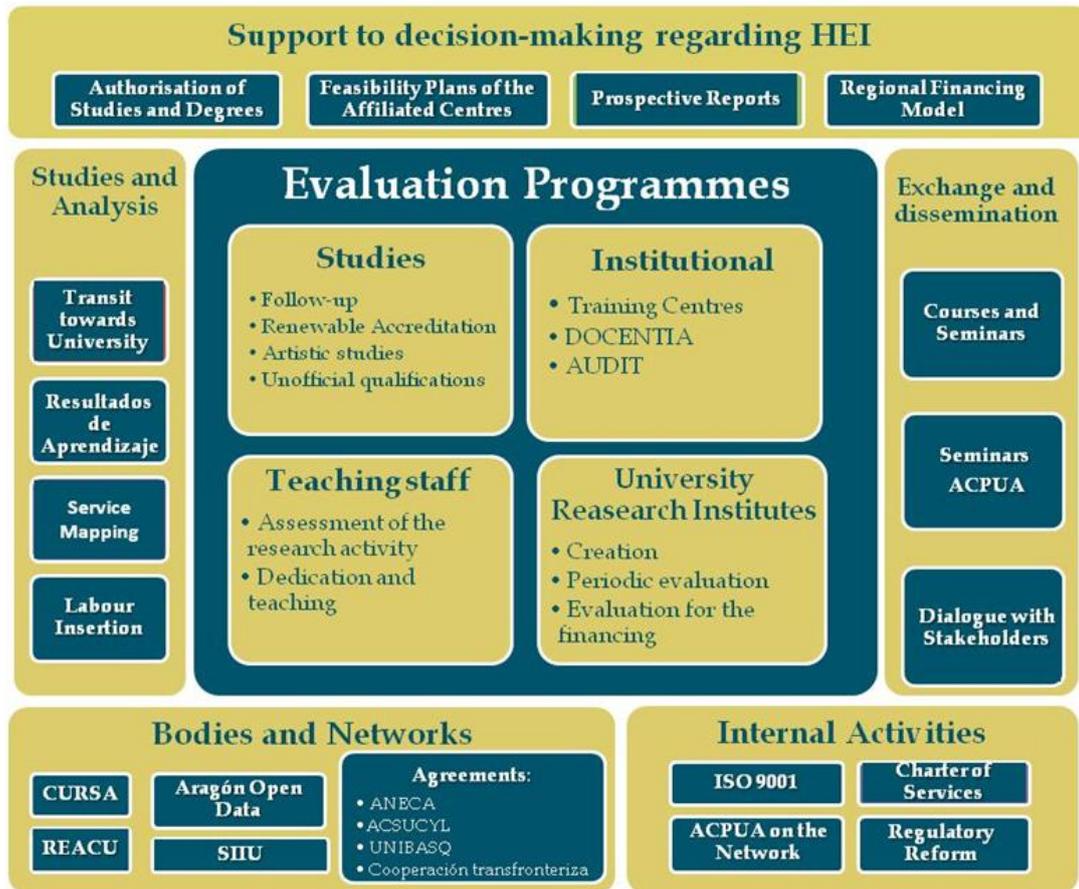
- **Governing bodies:**

- The Board of Directors is the highest organ, the Government board of the Agency, and it is chaired by the Minister of Education, University, Culture and Sports of the Government of Aragon. It is made up of Government representatives, representatives of the universities, social agents (business organisations, trade unions...) and experts. This Board of Directors is mainly in charge of dictating the general strategy of the Agency: approval of the programming and annual report on the activities, approval of the regional funding budget, etc.

- The Director is the person who leads the management of the Agency and designates the members of the Assessment, Accreditation and Certification Commission, on the proposal of the Experts Committee. On the proposal of the Minister of Education, University, Culture and Sports of the Government of Aragon and after having taken into account the opinion of the Board of Directors, he/she is contracted for four years, extendable for another four more years. He/she will serve on a full-time basis and exclusively.
- **Advisory body:**
 - The Experts Committee is the Agency consultative organ, and it is made up of National and International Experts who advise the ACPUA in order to increase its quality level and promote quality assurance procedures and activities.
- **Evaluation bodies:**
 - The Evaluation, Accreditation and Certification Commission, is also composed by external experts who deal with the evaluation procedures as well with the establishment of internal protocols ratifying the results of the evaluations carried out by the subcommissions and panels.
 - The evaluations are made by the Evaluation Subcommittees and panels that are made up of external and independent evaluators from outside Aragon appointed specifically for each process.

5. **With the vocation of offering a complete service in the region.** - As already mentioned, ACPUA's main activity consists in the evaluation of the Aragon university system. Its action is complemented with studies and outlook-reports and activities to spread and promote a quality culture of higher education within the context (institutional, social and economic) of such system. The bulk of this activity produces:

- Evaluation campaigns the results of which are published on our website.
- Technical reports related to the quality of higher education.
- Prospective studies on emerging needs, trends and demands regarding higher education in line with regional strategies.
- Conferences, seminars and workshops in collaboration with universities, research centres and stakeholders.



See description of activities in annex "Description Activities.doc".

Regardless of the legal and administrative effects associated to this "production" (mainly linked to the results of the evaluations and to specific reports that we hand to the competent authorities in the field of higher education), at ACPUA we try for such to be able to generate second readings by other actors and aimed at improving the quality of the education system in Aragon: for the managers of the universities to draw particular recommendations and feasible proposals for improvement; for the students and their families to obtain clarifying information regarding the progress of the qualifications; for teachers and researchers to find sound documentation in the field of teaching and research; for the public authorities to find data of a strategic value in our reports.

We are very aware that this vocation of connecting the quality assurance activity (QA) with the reflection regarding the quality of higher education in the region requires for ACPUA to strengthen at least two significant links, internally and externally:

- a) With regional stakeholders: to this regard, in the past years the Agency has intensified the relations and designed working-together formulas to organise events and carry out studies with relevant institutions and social agents such as the General Military Academy (the most significant military teaching centre in Spain, located in

Zaragoza), the Economic and Social Council of Aragón, the Aragonese Employment Institute, business schools, teacher unions, etc.

b) With other Spanish quality agencies: thus, in 2012 ACPUA signed two collaboration agreements with ANECA that facilitate our participation in different national evaluation programmes. And in 2013 collaboration agreements have also been signed with the agencies ACSUCYL and UNIBASQ to boost synergies and save costs, - through joint collaboration, the exchange of experiences and the shared use of technical and staff resources,- assuring the maximum efficiency possible in the application of evaluation programmes.

All this information is completed with the documentation that we attach in the annex. It may also be extended and verified on our website. Naturally, I remain at your disposal to try and clarify any doubts and provide, orally or in writing, any additional information you may require.

We look forward to a positive answer and to establish a formal relationship with ENQA, which from Aragón we consider highly important.

Yours sincerely,

Antonio Serrano González
Director