

ENQA Board
European Association for Quality Assurance
in Higher Education (ENQA)
Avenue de Tervuren 36/38, bte 4
1040 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

Zaragoza (Spain), 18 December 2014.

Dear ENQA Board,

As we already anticipated in our previous email in June of this year and to the ENQA staff during our last personal meetings (in Zurich, Brussels and Barcelona), I am very pleased to write now to formally request the acceptance of the Aragon Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ACPUA) as a full member of ENQA.

This is the final step of a crucial enhancement process of our Agency. Since it was started eight years ago, ACPUA has grown as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was implemented in the Spanish region of Aragon which it serves. ACPUA has observed and closely examined the day to day adaptation of the Bologna Plan and specifically its quality assurance policies.

Thanks to our dynamic and proactive spirit, we carry out an effective and thorough follow-up process of all university study programme documentation and public information, having visited each university yearly. In 2014, we were among the first Spanish Agencies to start a challenging and exciting task: the accreditation process of all our study programmes. Now, after having reviewed nine study programmes in the voluntary phase (spring 2014) and twenty-four in the compulsory phase (autumn 2014), we are very happy to report that the university system in Aragon is at the head of the accreditation process within Spain. As 2014 comes to its end, Aragon is at the top of the Spanish regions regarding the number of accredited study programmes.

We believe to be considered by the society of Aragon as an essential instrument for the assurance and promotion of the quality of its university system. With the highest levels of commitment, accountability, work ethic, transparency, objectivity and independence, we promote reflection, an open dialogue, continuous improvement and creativity in all our activities and tasks.

We are very strict about the quality of our reports: they are publicly available and always include applicable and useful recommendations towards improvement. Following the recommendations stated in the EOAre project, in which we participated, ACPUA places great emphasis on its transparency, ensuring the reports are very easily available by any stakeholder, and relying on a powerful online strategy in order to make them accessible by

anyone, at any time (thanks to the use of our website and social media to expand their dissemination).

In order to complete the consolidation of the Agency, it is natural for us to expect ACPUA to be a fully open and internationally connected regional entity. This is especially important for ACPUA, considering the proximity of Aragon to the South of France and the intellectual and cultural links which have existed for centuries between our university system and that of southern France.

Thus, in order to adequately serve and connect the region of Aragon within the EHEA, we aspire to become a qualified agency outside Aragon and a recognised interlocutor in the European university quality assurance arena. This wish requires the dialogue and cooperation with the main European and international university quality assurance networks.

Therefore, during the past three years, we have made important efforts to take on new challenges (such as the accreditation process, the evaluation of Research University Institutes, etc.) and primarily to review, reinforce and improve each of our procedures, with the aim of fully adapting them to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

Last year, in September 2013, we were happy to join ENQA as an affiliate member. Since then, we have continued to work steadily, taking decisive steps in preparation for our full membership.

2014 has been a crucial year. In constant communication with the ENQA team, which provides us with ongoing support and information, we have made the decision to apply for our full membership in 2015, according to the revised ESG, which are expected to be adopted on 14-15 May 2015 at the Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in Yerevan, Armenia.

Since the publication of ENQA's "Transitional arrangements for ENQA reviews in light of the revised ESG", we have been working hard towards our review in light of the revised ESG, making sure all of our procedures are aligned with the revised ESG's spirit and innovations, placing a special emphasis on reinforcing the importance of the students as a key stakeholder for higher education institutions as well as for the Agency.

In September, our Board of Directors, the highest government board of the Agency, unanimously approved the needed legal modifications in order to adapt our University Education Act to the latest requirements of higher education in the EHEA. We expect the Parliament of Aragon to approve these modifications by January 2015.

The main modifications apply to two important areas. On one hand, the updated University Education Act aims to reinforce students' participation by integrating them into our Board of Directors. On the other hand, it strengthens the accountability and transparency mechanisms which guide the activity of this QA Agency, including the need for an external evaluation process every five years.

These updates align with the latest requirements from the EHEA as well as with the concept of Open Governance, a model of public administration which implies greater transparency and participation of society in all public policies.

That been said, we would like to formally request to undergo the international review and acquire the status of full member. This is the unanimous feeling of our Board of Directors, expressed in its last meeting held on September 23rd, 2014.

Joining ENQA is, for us, a natural and necessary step in moving forward. Also, taking into consideration the regulation on competences provided by the current Spanish legislation regarding the accreditation of university studies, this step is in fact decisive.

Following the procedure established by you for these cases, I am pleased to inform you that we want to undergo a type A review. We also request, in accordance with what we had agreed with the staff from ENQA, that our self-evaluation report (SER) and the site-visit be based on the revised ESG. In addition, I would like to formally confirm that our SER will be sent to the ENQA Secretariat in June 2015. Ideally, ACPUA would like the site visit to take place in September-October of 2015.

As an appendix to this letter, you will find a summary of the most important milestones in our process "Towards ENQA", which of course will be clarified and extended in our SER.

Our website address is acpua.aragon.es, and our contact person for everything referring to our relations with you is Ms. Irene Melchor, Quality Technician of ACPUA and person in charge of international relations and communications, whose contact details are as follows:

Irene Melchor
E-mail: imelchorl@aragon.es
Telephone numbers:
Office: +34 976 71 33 11
Mobile: +34 610 98 86 58

Of course, I remain at your disposal to try and clarify any questions you may have and provide, orally or in writing, any additional information you may require.

We look forward to a positive answer and to establishing a formal relationship with ENQA, joining the association as full members.

Yours sincerely,



Antonio Serrano González
DIRECTOR DE LA AGENCIA DE CALIDAD
Y PROSPECTIVA UNIVERSITARIA DE ARAGON

Dates	Milestone	Explanation / Goals
2005	Aragón University Education Act	The Aragon University Education Act establishes the need for a regional QA Agency to promote the quality of the university system of Aragon, developing technical assessment, certification and accreditation tasks.
2006	Start of operation	ACPUA starts its technical QA, assessment, certification and accreditation operations.
April 14 th 2008	ENQA Seminar	Seminar on "Internal QA-systems and the ESG" (Barcelona, Spain).
December 31 st 2009	Award of label ISO 9001-2008	Certification assures that ACPUA serves its stakeholders aiming to enhance their satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements (annually renewed).
April 4 th -7 th 2011	INOAAHE Conference	INOAAHE Conference 2011 (Madrid, Spain).
2012	Awareness of the need to move forward	After several years operating, the different stakeholders recognize the need for ACPUA to join ENQA in order to benefit the Aragon university system.
June 11 th 2012	Board of Directors' Meeting	Official acknowledgement by ACPUA 's Board of Directors of the need to join ENQA.
May 23 rd 2013	Launch of program "Towards ENQA"	The Experts Committee recommends that ACPUA join ENQA, recognizing the benefits resulting for the Aragon University System and submitting document "Towards ENQA".
September 19 th 2013	Affiliation to ENQA	Board of ENQA grants ACPUA Affiliate status.
October 4 th 2013	"Towards ENQA": Steering Group Meeting	Working session with ad hoc international Steering Group (involving representatives of all stakeholders) results in creation of a "Towards ENQA Improvement Plan" (including goals, timeframes, and indicators).
November 5 th 2013	Cooperation agreement with Unibasq (Agencia de Calidad del Sistema Universitario Vasco)	Cooperation agreement aimed at developing shared ideas and best practices in the alignment of both Agencies' procedures and activities to the ESG in their process of becoming full members of ENQA. Aragon and the Basque country have a similar University System.
January 2014	Students join all expert panels	Accreditation procedures include external student members in all panels.
January 2014	ENQA Workshop (EQArep Project)	This workshop, entitled "Publication of QA results: purpose, structure and content" (Zurich, Switzerland), was part of the "Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports"(EQArep project).
June 2 nd -3 rd 2014	ENQA KP3 Working Group Seminar	ENQA Workshop "European QA agencies' ways to comply with the ESG in an international perspective, adhering to the European dimension: Shaping the future together" (Brussels, Belgium).
March 17 th 2014	Cooperation agreement with ACSUCYL (Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León)	Cooperation agreement aimed at promoting mutual learning and sharing feedback with a regional Spanish Agency already full member of ENQA.

June 2014	Hire of new Quality Assurance Technician	New QA Technician joins the team at ACPUA to reinforce all tasks related to the application for ENQA full membership and promote international communications.
July 2014	Revised ESG transitional arrangements	Publication of ENQA Document "Revised ESG transitional arrangements".
July 2014	New online strategy plan	ACPUA begins using Social Media and starts the development of its new website.
September 22 nd 2014	Board of Directors Meeting	The Board of Directors unanimously approves modifying the Aragon University Law and integrating student members in it.
September 22 nd 2014	Meeting in Brussels with ENQA	Technical meeting with ENQA in Brussels to discuss time frame for SER and site visit in 2015 according to the revised ESG.
September 23 rd 2014	ENQA Workshop (Final conference of EQArep project)	The workshop, entitled "Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports" focused on disseminating the EQArep project results and discussing about QA reports: stakeholders' perspectives on the use of reports, QA agencies' perspective on the features of good reports, and expectations of different targets.
October 21 st 2014	Experts Committee Recommendations	Production of Recommendations document in light of the revised ESG, focusing on topics such as the legal framework update and the student participation.
November 13 th -15 th 2014	EOAF Forum 2014	Participation in 9 th EOAF Forum, entitled "Changing education – QA and the shift from teaching to learning" (Barcelona, Spain).
November 2014	Phase I Strategic Plan Consultation Process	Wide survey to stakeholder groups in order to gather feedback for Strategic Plan.
December 2014	Launch of student engagement program: "ACPUA + Estudiantes" (ACPUA + Students)	The seminar "Students talking: Experiences promoting quality in higher education" serves to promote the program, which comprises all actions taken and planned for the future related to students' participation, communications, and training.
December 2014	Formal request to ENQA	Formal request to become full member of ENQA.
January 2015	Publication of the Aragon University Law modification	The updated legal framework will allow ACPUA to apply the needed organizational changes in order to align its structure to the revised ESG and reinforce its independence and relations towards all stakeholders, including students.
January 2015	Phase II Strategic Plan Consultation Process	Invitation to stakeholders to focus group to discuss feedback for Strategic Plan.
January 2015	Board of Directors Meeting	Approval of new organizational measures to finalize the alignment of ACPUA's activity to the revised ESG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of Strategic Plan. • Creation of Appeals Committee. • Creation of Student Advisory Board. • Integration of Students in Evaluation Subcommittees.
March 2015	First draft of SER	Submission of first draft of SER to Governing Board and Experts Committee.
March - April 2015	Internal and external feedback on SER	Delivery of SER to ACPUA Experts Committee, Evaluation, Accreditation and Certification Commission, Evaluation Subcommittees, Student Advisory Board, and staff for comments. Delivery to stakeholders: Universities, Aragon Government, students, trade unions, business, etc. for comments.
May 2015	Final draft of SER	Creation of final draft of SER after considering all internal and external comments and feedback.
June 2015	Submission of SER	Formal submission of SER to ENQA.