



ACPUA APPLICATION FOR ALIGNMENT WITH INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE (GGP)

Zaragoza, 24 November 2022

According to the Recognition Process for INQAAHE GGP alignment, the Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA) states that has been reviewed against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) by a reputable, external organization, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), with a criteria that could be considered to be substantially equivalent to or exceed the requirements set forth in the GGP.

Since the alignment process with the INQAAHE GGP requires submission of materials demonstrating the extent to which ACPUA is aligned with the GGP, ACPUA is providing the next documentation:

- ACPUA Self-Assessment Report. 2020
- GGP-ESG Mapping (page 3-4 of this document)

ENQA review:

- ENQA External Review Report. 2021
- Letter from ENQA to ACPUA. 2021

EQAR review:

- Renewal decision of inclusion on the Register from EQAR. 2021
- Renewal Letter from EQAR. 2021

The ACPUA received the site visit by the external panel appointed by ENQA on 25, 26 and 27 November 2020 (online visit), to be reviewed against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). This panel consisted of:

- Padraig Walsh. Chief Executive. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Chair
- Ewa Kolanovska. Self-employed / freelance consultant (Poland). Secretary
- Carmen Fenoll. Full Professor of Plant Physiology, Head of the Department of Environmental Sciences University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain). Academic
- Aleksandar Susnjar. PhD Student in Philosophy Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Rijeka (Croatia). Student



The panel concluded that ACPUA is in compliance with the ESG:

The ESGs where fully compliant achieved are:

- Part 3 – 3.1, 3.2., 3.3., 3.5 and 3.7.
- Part 2 – 2.2., 2.3., 2.4, 2.5. and 2.7.

The ESGs where substantially compliant achieved are:

- Part 3 – 3.4. and 3.6.
- Part 2 – 2.1. and 2.6.

What's more, the panel is not taking into consideration any partially complaint.

The panel praises a summary of commendations:

ESG 3.1: The panel commends ACPUA for developing ALCAEUS as a pioneering evaluation scheme focused on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which aims to enhance the social dimension of higher education in Aragón.

The panel commends ACPUA for ensuring extensive and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders, including students and professional and social partners, as well as international experts, in its governance and external quality assurance processes.

ESG 3.5: The panel commends ACPUA for the professionalism of its staff and their passionate commitment to work which is highly valued by its stakeholders.

The panel commends ACPUA for the significant increase in the funding allocated to development work.

ESG 3.6: The panel commends ACPUA for its responsiveness to the feedback collected from stakeholders in a continuous effort to enhance its policies, structures and procedures.

The panel commends ACPUA for its efforts to ensure that the principles of tolerance, non-discrimination, equality and gender balance feature prominently in its policy and practice.

ESG 2.2: The panel commends ACPUA for involving extensively all stakeholders in the design of its evaluation methodologies, and for seeking regularly and integrating their inputs in continuous improvement of its processes.

ESG 2.4: The panel commends ACPUA for involving international experts in all programme reaccreditation reviews.

In addition, the panel submits some recommendations:

The panel provides recommendations for the agency to achieve full compliance with ESG 3.4, 3.6, 2.1 and 2.6.

ESG 3.4: The panel recommends that ACPUA develop a more systematic and deeper approach to the analysis of findings from its evaluation processes, and expand its research



activities to provide reports that discuss trends and developments at the level of the Aragon higher education system.

ESG 3.6: The panel recommends that ACPUA bridge the gaps in its internal quality assurance system by closing the feedback loops between its evaluation bodies and reviewers, and by putting in place a procedure to deal with breaches of its Code of Ethics that might occur in the future.

ESG 2.1: The panel recommends that ACPUA develop a coherent approach to address more explicitly student-centred learning, teaching and assessment in its evaluation methodologies, and pay special attention to these issues in its training for reviewers.

ESG 2.6: The panel recommends that ACPUA continue its efforts to ensure that reports in all evaluation processes provide sufficient evidence and analysis to substantiate judgments, and that report writing for the new processes follow best practice. For a related recommendation on feedback to be provided to review panels, see ESG 3.6.

Next, this is the map for equivalences between GGP and ESG:

GGP-ESG Mapping

GGP	ESG. PART 3: STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES	ESG. PART 2: STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE
1 The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA) 1.1 Legitimacy and recognition 1.2 Mission and purposes 1.3 Governance and organisational structure 1.4 Resources	3.2 Official status 3.3 Independence 3.5 Resources	
2 Accountability of the EQAA 2.1 Quality assurance of the EQAA 2.2 Links to the QA community	3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct	



GGP	ESG. PART 3: STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES	ESG. PART 2: STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE
3 The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in HEIs 3.1 The relationship between the EQAA and HEIs 3.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review 3.3 The requirements for self-evaluation	3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance	2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose 2.3 Implementing processes 2.4 Peer-review experts 2.5 Criteria for outcomes
4 The EQAA and its relationship to the public 4.1 Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions 4.2 Other public reports	3.4 Thematic analysis	2.6 Reporting
5 Decision making 5.1 The decision-making process 5.2 The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints		2.7 Complaints and appeals
6 The QA of cross-border higher education 6.1 Criteria for cross-border higher education 6.2 Collaboration between agencies		ESG: purposes and principles The ESG have the following purposes: - They set a common framework for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level; - They enable the assurance and improvement of quality of higher education in the European higher education area; - They support mutual trust , thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and <u>across national borders</u> ; - They provide information on quality assurance in the EHEA.



Followed by, this is a summary of ENQA External Review Report, 2021:

Part 3: Standards for quality assurance agencies.

3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard: Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant

3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard: Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognized as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant

3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard: Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for 27 their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant

3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard: Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: substantially compliant / EQAR: substantially compliant

ENQA (2021): “ACPUA has put a lot of work and emphasis in the seminar programmes that it runs for the benefit of stakeholders and has worked on useful exercises such as the study on labour market insertion of graduates, the analysis of low-demand programmes and reports on findings from programme accreditation reviews. Clearly, in choosing the topics for analysis, the agency caters to the diverse interests and needs of all stakeholder groups. There is also a commitment in the agency to develop its research function, as evidenced by the inclusion of thematic analyses in its Strategic Plan, the increase in funding for such activities and the new staff member hired” (p. 21).

3.5 RESOURCES

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

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant



3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard: Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: substantially compliant / EQAR: substantially compliant

ENQA (2021): “The policy and procedural documents underpinning the IQAS clearly define ACPUA’s quality standards and the processes and procedures in place to achieve them. The panel confirms that the values statement and the documents are published on the agency’s website. Overall, the responsibilities within the IQA system are clearly distributed, the processes and procedures are regularly reviewed, and there is evidence that the agency acts upon the feedback collected.” (p. 25).

“ACPUA has in place a mix of complementary, formal and less formal, mechanisms for gathering regularly external feedback which are fully satisfactory to its stakeholders. The examples given by the stakeholders demonstrate that the agency acts upon their feedback in improving its strategic plans, organisational structure and EQA activities. Internally, feedback from staff is collected in a less formal way.” (p. 25).

“The panel found that the agency acts in a very professional manner in all its activities.” (p. 26).

3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard: Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant

Part 2: Standards for external quality assurance

2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard: External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of the ESG.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: substantially compliant / EQAR: substantially compliant

ENQA (2021): “Following the 2016 review recommendation, ACPUA has successfully promoted IQAS certification (and initial institutional accreditation based on this process), as evidenced by several centres that have obtained initial accreditation, and continues to do so in its dialogue meetings. Along the same lines, it has made efforts to develop the institutional follow-up accreditation processes which are expected to address better SCL and focus on supporting quality enhancement, even though the progress in its work has been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency has also streamlined its programme follow-up to make the programme accreditation processes more coherent, although there is limited space for changes as the procedures are largely predetermined by the national legislation.” (p. 33).



2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard: External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant

2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard: External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant

2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard: External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant

2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard: Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant

2.6 REPORTING

Standard: Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: substantially compliant / EQAR: substantially compliant

ENQA (2021): “The panel confirms that evaluation reports, including those with unfavourable decisions, are published on the ACPUA website, as well as on the DEQAR portal. The panel has examined a sample of reports for all fully implemented evaluation processes (provided by ACPUA and downloaded from its website) and finds them clear and accessible.” (p. 46).

“The panel notes that ACPUA has in place the good practice of sending reports for a factual accuracy check and feedback to reviewed HEIs.” (p. 47).

“To implement the 2016 review recommendation, ACPUA has put in place a sound mechanism for scrutinising final reports, which involves the Evaluation Committees and technical staff. Based on the analysis of two or three reports per evaluation process (except for partner HEI evaluation where the most recent one was produced in 2014), the panel considers that there is a high level of consistency between reports produced in a given process.” (p. 47).



2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard: Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Panel conclusion: ENQA: fully compliant / EQAR: fully compliant

En Zaragoza, a 24 de noviembre de 2022.

Director

Antonio Serrano González