

ACPUA

SELF ASSESSMENT REPORT 2025



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Part I - Background

1. Introduction

The Aragon Agency of Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA) is the official higher education evaluation agency of the Autonomous Community of Aragon (Spain).

It was created in 2005 by Law 5/2005, of 14 June, on the Organisation of the University System of Aragon¹. Its legal nature is that of an autonomous body (public law entity), with its own legal personality and assets and full capacity to fulfil its purposes. It carries out its functions with objectivity, impartiality and independence, recognised and guaranteed by law. It is governed by its own Statutes, approved in 2006 (Decree 239/2006, of 4 December)².

ACPUA's mission is to guarantee and promote the quality of the university system in Aragon. This mission includes the development of useful links between the university (including the student body), the socio-productive fabric, the institutional decision-making bodies and Aragonese society as a whole, as well as the promotion of the exchange of experiences, not only with other national and international university systems.

To achieve this mission, ACPUA mainly carries out technical tasks of evaluation, certification and accreditation. This public service activity is complemented by study and foresight work and by activities to promote an educational culture, integrating the social dimension of university quality in a transversal manner within the territory.

ACPUA has been a full member of ENQA since 2016 and is registered in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (EQAR) since 2016. Furthermore, ACPUA is a member of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), having demonstrated its alignment with the Good Practice Guidelines (GGP) of this organisation³.

In accordance with the cycle established by ENQA and EQAR, ACPUA undergoes another external review in 2025, 5 years after the previous assessment, which ended in 2021. Having obtained a positive result in its first two evaluations, ACPUA is eligible for this review in the "targeted review" mode.

As stated in the Terms of Reference (ToR) document, within the scope of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) ACPUA develops the activities shown in Figure 1. The activities shaded in green, although reported in the Self Assessment Report (SAR) submitted for evaluation in 2020, were not yet developed. These new assessment protocols have been designed to ensure ESG compliance, following receipt of the results of pilot assessments. Specifically, in 2022, ACPUA informed EQAR about the implementation of the ALCAEUS programme and in 2024 the institutional accreditation renewal process was developed and launched for the first time at the end of 2024.

¹ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2005/BOE-A-2005-14406-consolidado.pdf>

² https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/d_239_2006_estatutos.pdf

³ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/assessment-inqaah>

TOR (2020) ENQA	Substantive Change Report EQAR	TOR (2025) ENQA
Evaluation of programmes		
Study programme initial accreditation		Study programme initial accreditation
Study programme accreditation		Study programme accreditation
Study programme follow-up		Study programme follow-up
Evaluation of institutions		
Training schools accreditation		Training schools accreditation
Higher education institutions initial accreditation		Higher education institutions initial accreditation.
Teaching activity evaluation system audit (DOCENTIA Programme)		Teaching activity evaluation system audit (DOCENTIA Programme)
Teaching staff evaluation system audit		Teaching staff evaluation system audit
Partner HEI evaluation		Partner HEI evaluation
PACE-SIGC (IQAS Certification)	2024	PACE-SIGC (IQAS Certification)
Institutional accreditation		Institutional accreditation
Follow-up accreditation	2024	Institutional Accreditation Renewal (Institutional Follow-up Accreditation)
SDG/Agenda 2030 Certification (ALCAEUS programme)	2022	Certification SDG/Agenda 2030 (ALCAEUS programme)

Figure 1: AC external quality assurance activities

This figure also highlights the PACE-SIGC programme, which was also reported in 2024 to EQAR, having been subject to revision following the publication of a new national legal framework, which establishes some criteria for the evaluation of the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) of Doctoral Schools.

In addition, as noted in the ToR document, ACPUA also undertakes the following activities that fall outside the scope of the ESG:

- ACPUA quality seminars.
- Initial accreditation (establishment) and renewal (periodic evaluation) of university research institutes
- Evaluation of research activities.
- Evaluation of the research activity of junior academic staff.
- Strategic foresight studies/surveys.
- Consultancy: support for the decision-making process.

This SAR aims to show the evolution of ACPUA since its second review concluded in 2021, while also offering a reflective analysis of this evolution over the last 5 years.

2. Preparation of the Self Assessment Report (SAR)⁴

After receiving ENQA's response to the ACPUA follow up report in September 2023, the agency began the process of defining its new Strategic Plan 2024-2028. This process of defining the new Strategic Plan allowed the agency to review in depth, with the participation of the different stakeholders, both its current activities and the projection that the agency's activities should have in the coming years. As a starting point, a SWOT analysis was carried out with the participation of all stakeholders, both internal and external (see Part III - SWOT analysis).

The internal committee⁵ (responsible for advising on strategic planning and, consequently, on the actions of strategic line 1, objective 2 of the 2025 activity plan⁶) in charge of drafting

⁴ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/external-review-acpua-o>

⁵ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/comite_pe_2024-28.es_en-gb.pdf

⁶ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/plan_actividades_2025_en-gb.pdf

the SAR was then appointed. The process of drafting the first draft of this document started with the review of the documentation of the previous assessment (both, the SAR prepared by ACPUA and the reports of ENQA and EQAR) and the documentation related to the follow up carried out by ENQA during the year 2023.

The ENQA and EQAR guidelines on writing the report were taken into consideration for the drafting of the SAR. In addition, in March 2025, ACPUA attended the ENQA agency review seminar for agencies planning to undergo a review in 2025-2026 (hosted by ANECA Madrid, Spain), which was very helpful in focusing the work of the internal committee.

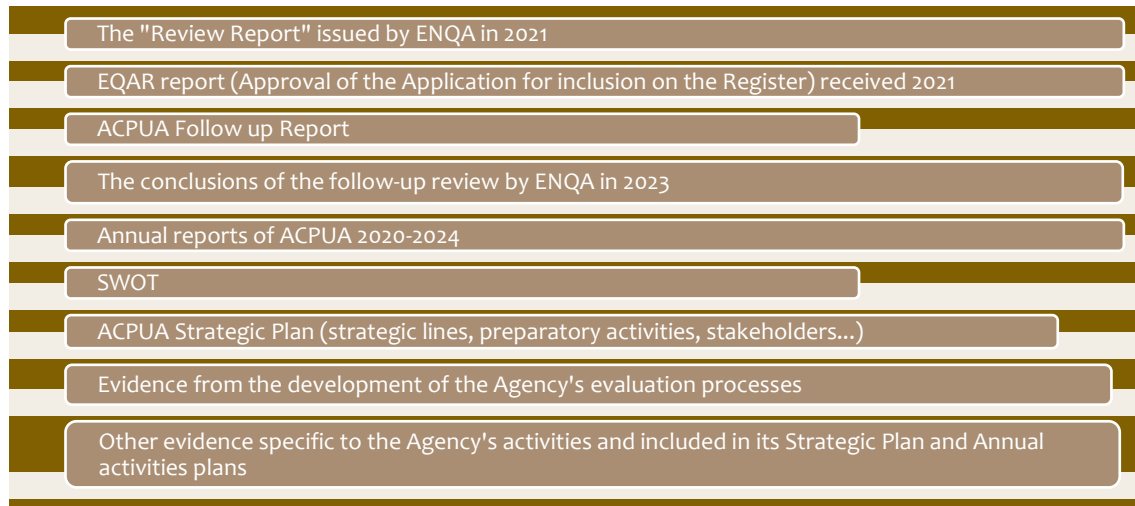


Figure 2: SAR main sources

Subsequently, an initial reflection was carried out with the SAR's Internal Committee to design both the structure (once the "Terms of Reference" document was approved) and the involvement of stakeholders in its drafting.

The Internal Committee considered that the "targeted review" modality was the most appropriate for the assessment of the agency, having passed the two previous assessments with a favourable result and, as shown in Figure 3, with an observable improvement between the first and the second assessment (S stands for substantial compliance and F for full compliance).

EVALUATION		2016	2020
2.1.	Consideration of internal quality assurance	S	S
2.2.	Designing methodologies fit for purpose	S	F
2.3.	Implementing processes	F	F
2.4.	Peer-review experts	S	F
2.5.	Criteria for outcomes	F	F
2.6.	Reporting	S	S
2.7.	Complaints and appeals	S	F
3.1.	Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance	S	F
3.2.	Official status	F	F
3.3.	Independence	F	F
3.4.	Thematic analysis	S	S
3.5.	Resources	S	F
3.6.	Internal quality assurance and professional conduct	S	S
3.7.	Cyclical external review of agencies	F	F

Figure 3: ENQA evaluation results



Figure 4: Timetable of the Self Assessment Report

Once the modality was defined and following the indications of the ToR document, signed with ENQA and EQAR, the structure of the SAR was worked on and the following aspects were included as central aspects of revision:

- Analysis of compliance with Part 2 standards in new activities (Institutional Accreditation Renewal , ALCAEUS programme and PACE-SIGC programme), paying special attention to ESG 2.2, ESG2.5 and ESG 2.6 (see section 5).
- Analysis of ESG 2.4 compliance in all activities: how the agency includes student members in all panels of its activities (see section 5.4).
- Selected area for improvement: ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose (see section 6).

In parallel, the ACPUA website⁷ was updated to meet the criteria of publicity and transparency, specifying the timetable for the elaboration of the SAR and the composition of the advisory committee⁸ (Annex III). The calendar detailed the participation of stakeholders during the months of April and May 2025 (see Figure 4).

Once the first draft had been prepared, the internal committee (advisors) met online in

April to review the strategic aspects of the document. The document was finalised in May, integrating the contributions of the Board of Directors and the agency's evaluation committees.

3. Changes since the last complete revisión

Since the last full review completed in 2021, there have been no major changes in the structure of the Aragon University System or the agency. The relevant changes in this period have been due to new developments in the regulatory framework of higher education at national level. Below, we review the milestones that have occurred in relation to the University System of Aragon (SUA), the agency, the legal framework and external university quality assurance activities.

3.1. Changes in the University System of Aragon (SUA)

The SUA has not undergone significant changes since the previous evaluation. The system is made up of two universities (one public, the University of Zaragoza, the other private, the

⁷ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/external-review-acpua-0>

⁸ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/comite_pe_2024-28.es_en-gb.pdf

University of San Jorge) and four centres of higher artistic education, as described in the 2020 SAR document⁹.

The updated data for the two universities are shown in Figures 5 and 6.

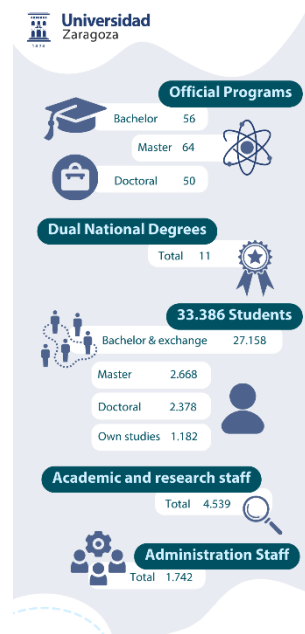


Figure 5: University of Zaragoza

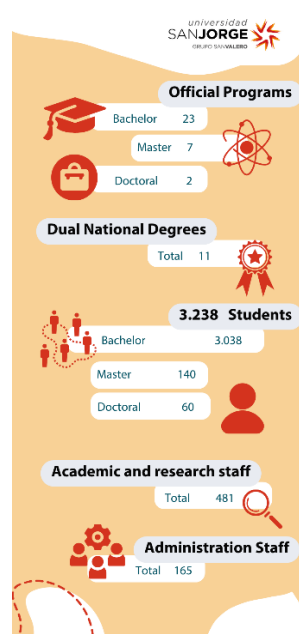


Figure 6: University San Jorge

The most significant advance within the SUA is the gradual implementation of Institutional accreditation, which is a voluntary process under Spanish legislation. University centres may opt for this type of assessment, moving from the Study programme accreditation (individual assessment of their degree programmes) to Institutional accreditation (joint assessment of the centre and its degree programmes).

In the period between evaluations (2020-2025), the number of institutionally accredited centres has risen from 5 to 17, which impacts 100% of the bachelor's and master's degree programmes of the University San Jorge (which has all its centres accredited) and 79% of the degree programmes of the University of Zaragoza. Therefore, approximately 90% of SUA bachelor's and master's degrees are taught in institutionally accredited centres.

Not only has progress been made in the implementation of this evaluation system, but the first institutional accreditation renewal have already been carried out this academic year. Specifically, the University of Zaragoza has renewed the institutional accreditation of two of its centres, the School of Engineering and Architecture (EINA) at the end of 2024 and the Higher Polytechnic School (EPSH) at the beginning of 2025. University San Jorge will undergo the process of renewing the institutional accreditation of its three centres in the last quarter of 2025.

In relation to the international scope, the most relevant milestone for the SUA is the participation of the University of Zaragoza in the Alliance of European Universities called Universitas Montium (UNITA). This competitive project of the European Commission began its first phase, together with 5 other university institutions, in 2020. It is currently developing its second phase, together with 11 other universities until 2026. ACPUA has participated as a

⁹https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/200915_acpua_sar_2020.pdf

partner of the University of Zaragoza for this project since its inception, also holding the positions of President and Vice-President of the Internal Quality Evaluation Committee (QEB) of this Alliance.

3.2. Agency changes

There have been no changes in the structure of the governing bodies and technical bodies, nor in the functions assumed by them. It should be noted that during this period work has continued with some of the measures adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as teleworking or the management of meetings via telematic platforms.

The most relevant events of this period were the following:

- Establishment of the Thematic Evaluation Committee (SETE).
- Establishment of the Faculty Evaluation Committee (SEP).
- Extension of the term of the Strategic Plan 2019-2022 for two financial years.
- Resignation of the Director of ACPUA, Mr. Antonio Serrano González (8 March 2023) and appointment of the new director, Ms Cristina Rodríguez Coarasa (8 November 2023).
- Adaptation of evaluation protocols to the new national regulations.
- Follow-up to the ENQA evaluation.
- Drafting of the new Strategic Plan 2024-2028¹⁰.

In 2021, as foreseen in the cross-cutting strategic line 7+1 of the Strategic Plan in force at the time, the agency reinforced its structure to adapt to new evaluation trends and activities by creating two new committees: the Thematic Evaluation Committee (SETE) and the Faculty Evaluation Committee (SEP). These two committees work on activities outside the scope of the ESG. Information on the composition and functions of each of the bodies is available on the website¹¹.

The SETE, whose creation was approved on 17 June 2021 by the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation (CECA), responded to the need that arose in ACPUA to develop some of the lines of the Strategic Plan 2019-2022. At the end of this Strategic Plan (that was extended for two more years), SETE was dissolved in September 2024.

The SEP, whose creation was approved by the CECA at a meeting held on 22 November 2021, was set up as an eminently technical body for the review and harmonisation of the evaluations of the new programme for the evaluation of persons in the area of health sciences (PCDVC accreditation) entrusted to ACPUA by regulation of the Government of Aragon (evaluation outside the ESG)¹².

With regard to the Strategic Plan 2019-2022, the ACPUA Board of Directors decided to extend its validity in order to allow the new director of the agency, appointed at the end of 2023, to lead the definition of the new Strategic Plan. The period during which this plan was developed and coincided with the term of the new director's appointment.

ACPUA's budget (Figure 7) has remained constant over the last few years, which is proof of the confidence of the Government of Aragon in its autonomous agency.

¹⁰ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/strategy>

¹¹ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/organisation>

¹² <https://www.boa.aragon.es/cgi-bin/EBOA/BRSCGI?CMD=VEROBJ&MLKOB=1049534924747>

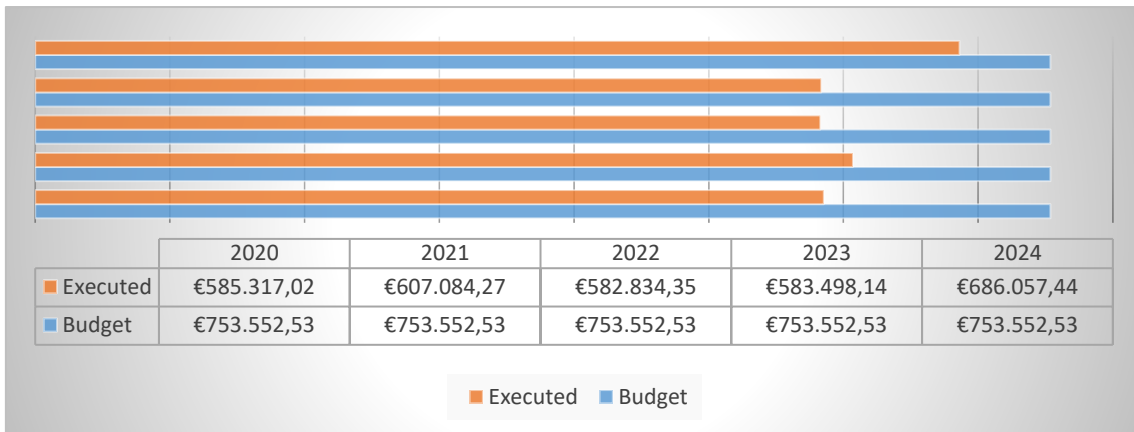


Figure 7: Budget evolution

The regulatory changes that have led to the revision of the programmes of both universities, as well as the stabilisation of the agency's staff, which has now filled all posts, has led to an increase in the execution of this budget in the last financial year, exceeding 90% (Figure 8).

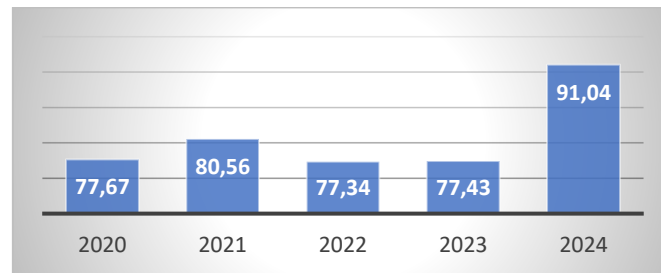


Figure 8: Percentage Budget execution

ACPUA also generates its own income by carrying out evaluations outside the SUA. Following the hiatus due to the Covid19 pandemic, the agency has resumed some activities of evaluation of individuals and research for external entities (e.g. evaluation of individuals at the University of Cantabria and evaluation of research institutes and research groups at the Public University of Navarra). Figure 9 shows the income received by the agency for these activities in the last 5 years.

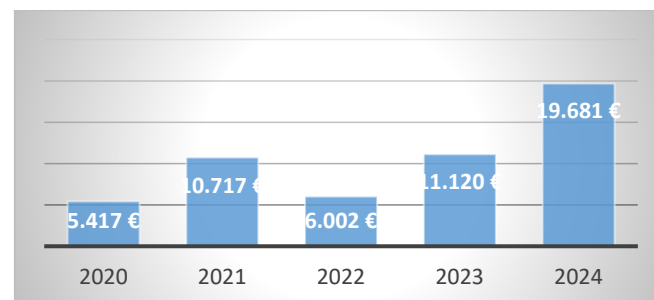


Figure 9: Income generated

3.3. Changes in the legal framework

Since the last review, the national legal framework in the field of higher education has undergone some reforms:

- Publication of Royal Decree 822/2021, of 28 September, establishing the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, which replaces Royal Decree 1393/2007, of 29 October, establishing the organisation of official university

education.

- Publication of Royal Decree 640/2021, of 27 July, on the creation, recognition and authorisation of universities and university centres, and institutional accreditation of university centres, which replaces Royal Decree 420/2015, of 29 May, on the creation, recognition, authorisation and accreditation of universities and university centres.
- Publication of Organic Law 2/2023 of 22 March on the University System, which replaces Organic Law 6/2001 of 21 December on Universities.
- Publication of Royal Decree 576/2023, of 4 July, amending Royal Decree 99/2011, of 28 January, regulating official doctoral studies.

These regulatory changes do not imply changes to the processes, criteria or methodologies of the external quality assurance activities or in the types of evaluation processes that have been carried out up to this point (except for those already communicated in the ToR). However, they have indeed required an update of the guides of some processes to align them in detail with the new regulations. These adaptations have been carried out in collaboration with the Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies, REACU^{13,14}. Furthermore, in order to consolidate their implementation, training sessions have been held for experts¹⁵ and for the universities¹⁶, which in turn have had to adapt their programmes and IQAS to the new regulatory requirements.

The main changes coming from the new regulatory framework are the following:

- The non-substantial modifications (included in **Study programme initial accreditation**) review process is simplified, and in case of centres with Institutional accreditation only communication to the agency is needed.
- Harmonization of the study programme review cycle incorporates the new dates and denomination of the current regulations into the **Study programme accreditation** protocol. Previously, the period was 4 years for master's degrees and 6 years for all other programmes. Now all degrees are renewed every 6 years, except for those with 300 or 360 credits, which are renewed every 8 years.
- The protocol for **Higher education institutions initial** accreditation has been updated for the agency, including the dates and denomination of the current regulations, but not the content. In addition, a Phd student has been included on the panel of reviewers in line with the 2021 EQAR report recommendations.
- The conditions for the **Institutional accreditation** of university centres have been updated to include centres that provide doctoral programmes, while previous regulations included only centres that offered bachelor's and master's degrees. Additionally, a change in the regulations states that study programmes offered by centres with institutional accreditation are exempt from monitoring and accreditation follow up processes.

3.4. External quality assurance activities

Figure 10 shows the number of evaluation processes carried out during the period covered by this report. The most numerous actions are those related to the evaluation of programmes

¹³ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/noticias/reacu-meeting>

¹⁴ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/noticias/line-new-royal-decrees-reacu-meetings>

¹⁵ <https://acpua.aragon.es/es/eventos/conferencia-acpua-2022>

¹⁶ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/noticias/meeting-vice-rector-academic-policy-university-zaragoza-and-his-team>

(PhD, master's and bachelor's degrees) (see Figure 11).

The number of evaluations depends on the activity of the universities in relation to their educational offer. Initial Accreditation/modification of programmes is related to the definition of new PhD, master's or bachelor's degrees or changes in existing ones.

With regard to the renewal of programmes accreditation, in recent years there has been a decrease in the number of evaluations due to the increase in the number of institutionally accredited centres and the change introduced by Royal Decree 822/2021, which increased the evaluation period for Master's degrees from four to six years.

EVALUATION	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
PROGRAMMES						
Study programme initial accreditation	26	20	8	34	41	36
Study programme accreditation	5	61	4	1	6	-
Study programme follow-up ¹⁷	-	-	-	-	-	-
INSTITUTIONS						
Training schools accreditation	1	1	1	1	1	-
Higher education institutions initial accreditation	-	-	-	-	-	-
Teaching activity evaluation system audit (DOCENTIA Programme)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Teaching staff evaluation system audit	1	1	1	1	1	-
Partner HEI evaluation	-	-	-	-	-	-
PACE-SIGC (IQAS Certification)	3	1	1	2	1	2
Institutional accreditation	2	3	-	2	3	-
Institutional Accreditation Renewal (Institutional Follow-up Accreditation)	-	-	-	-	2	-
Certification SDG/Agenda 2030 (ALCAEUS programme)	-	-	2	-	-	-

Figure 10: Number of evaluations

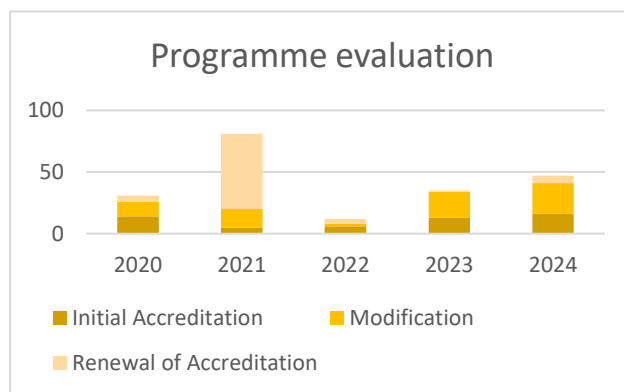


Figure 11: Evolution of programme evaluation

The year 2021 saw the renewal of the accreditation of all the PhD programmes of the University of Zaragoza, which was a challenge for the agency due to the large number of existing programmes (50 PhD programmes were evaluated), as can be seen in Figure 11.

3.5. New external quality assurance activities

The 2020 SAR described the two new external quality assurance activities launched in this period, although no procedures had yet been carried out. This is the case for the Institutional Accreditation Renewal (Institutional Follow-up Accreditation) and the Certification

¹⁷ Follow-up between two programme accreditations is required if the degree has undergone a renewal subject to monitoring. In contrast, programmes offered at institutions without institutional accreditation must submit at least one internal follow-up report three years after the effective implementation or accreditation renewal, in accordance with the quality agency's guidelines.

SDG/Agenda 2030 (ALCAEUS programme).

Institutional Accreditation Renewal (Institutional Follow-up Accreditation)¹⁸

Institutional Accreditation Renewal takes place six years after the institutions have achieved initial institutional accreditation. Initial institutional accreditation is achieved once the institution has a certified IQAS (in the SUA the institutions certify the implementation of their IQAS through the PACE-SIGC Programme) and the accreditation of at least half of their bachelor's, master's or PhD programmes has been renewed.

After six years, the Institutional Accreditation Renewal has to corroborate that the institution maintains its IQAS in operation, thus ensuring the collection of information on its programmes, its analysis and its decision-making on the training offer, and demonstrating that its students achieve the intended learning outcomes. The Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme described in the framework document published on the agency's website¹⁹ includes a site visit in which the panel of experts meets with representatives of all stakeholders and visits the institution's facilities.

In 2024, two centres in Aragon were evaluated as a pilot for the Institutional Accreditation Renewal process. Once both evaluations were completed, a meta-evaluation of the process was carried out, with the participation of the evaluators and representatives of the centres evaluated, leading to different proposals for improvement. After analysing the results of the meta-evaluation, the CECA proceeded to approve the final version of the documents relating to the ACPUA Institutional Accreditation Renewal. Programme (January 31, 2025).

Certification SDG/Agenda 2030 (ALCAEUS programme)²⁰

The ALCAEUS programme is an international assessment protocol that measures the degree of commitment of university centres to the SDGs (section 5.2 how the process developed with the agreement and participation of the universities and other stakeholders). The main objective of the 2030 certification of centres, awarded by the ALCAEUS programme, is to give visibility to the efforts that institutions are making to comply with the SDGs, set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda. The process involves the award of a seal that establishes four levels of certification based on the score obtained in the assessment.

The condition for applying for this programme is that higher education institutions are accredited by an EQAR-registered Quality Assurance Agency through an ESG (European Standards and Guidelines) alignment procedure. It has to demonstrate that it has a certified IQAS (in the SUA by the PACE - SIGC Programme or outside the SUA by any other IQAS assessment programme) and apply for the assessment by being visited by a panel of experts who will interview all stakeholders, as described in the ALCAEUS programme framework document published on the agency's website²¹.

The first application of the ALCAEUS programme was carried out at the end of 2021 with the evaluation of two centres of the University of Zaragoza. The final reports were published in March 2022. This evaluation served as a pilot experience in the application of the evaluation protocol. At the end of the process, a meta-evaluation of the programme was also carried out with the participation of the stakeholders. After analysing the results of the meta-evaluation, the CECA also proceeded in this case to approve the final version of the ALCAEUS programme documents (June 24, 2022).

¹⁸ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/institutional-accreditation-and-renewal>

¹⁹ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_institutional_accrreditation_renewal_en.pdf

²⁰ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/acpua-certification-programme-2030-alcaeus>

²¹ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/220624_alcaeus_protocol.pdf

PACE-SIGC (IQAS Certification)²²

In addition, due to the above-mentioned state regulatory changes, the PACE-SIGC programme has undergone changes, including Doctoral Schools within the scope of the programme. The new version of the evaluation protocol was approved in the first half of 2024, thus adapting to the guidelines given by the national regulations²³. In 2025, evaluation is being carried out according to the new protocol.

These news protocols are inserted in the ACPUA's Internal Quality Assurance System. The process map shows all the evaluation activities carried out by the agency (see Figure 12).

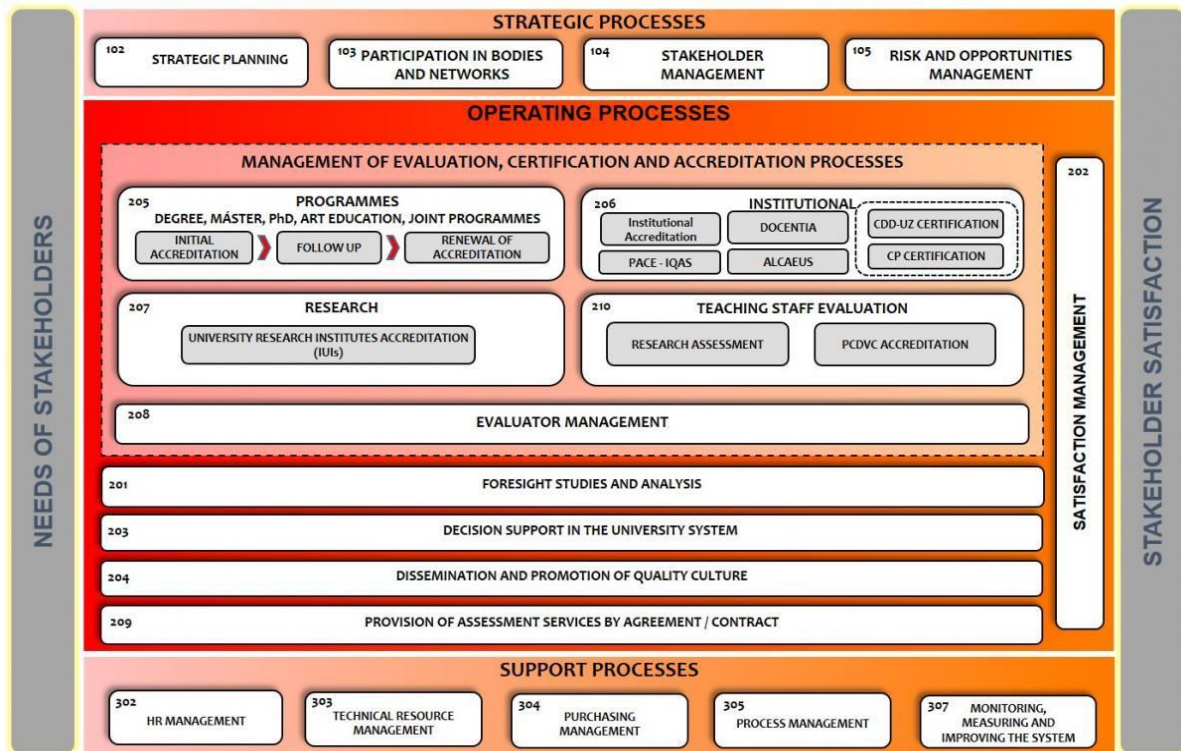


Figure 12: Map of the ACPUA processes

In addition, the agency has a charter of services that was revised in 2022. The new service charter and the monitoring of its indicators are published on the ACPUA website²⁴.

In the new Strategic Plan, Line 5+1 on the continuous improvement of the agency's performance includes objective 2 which involves "updating the certification of the agency's ISO9001 system". The achievement of this objective will entail a necessary review of the system to improve its alignment with the new national and regional regulations, as well as with the guidelines of the strategic plan.

²² <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/pace-sigc-iqas-certification>

²³ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/resolucion_3_03_2022_procedimiento_acreditacion_institucional.pdf

²⁴ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/strategy>

Part II - Priority areas

4. ESG part 3 focus areas

As shown in the 2020 SAR, during the previous five years, ACPUA greatly improved all aspects related to ESG part 3, incorporating all recommendations received by the expert panel in the first assessment. As a consequence, all related standards of this part were rated by EQAR as fully implemented.

In addition, the two recommendations issued in 2021 by ENQA in relation to standards 3.4 and 3.6 were addressed with particular interest in the Follow up Report issued in 2023, receiving praise for the improvement the agency had experienced over the previous five years, in particular by boosting thematic analysis.

Therefore, in this targeted review report, as reflected in the ToR document, the agency does not have to address this section in an exhaustive manner and only refers the expert panel to our website where they can find all the information on the organisation, structure, legislation and transparency, among other aspects²⁵.

5. ESG Part 2 focus areas

5.1. Standard 2.1: Consideration of internal quality assurance

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

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Recommendation: <i>The panel recommends that ACPUA develop a coherent approach to more explicitly address student-centred learning, teaching and assessment in its evaluation methodologies, and pay special attention to these issues in its training for reviewers.</i>
Suggestions for further development: <i>ACPUA could consider how some aspects highlighted in the guidelines to Part 1 ESG, such as stakeholder involvement in internal quality assurance, could be more explicitly addressed in its evaluation methodology, in particular for programme re-accreditation. The panel also encourages ACPUA to initiate discussions within REACU with a view to developing a common approach to addressing student-centred learning, teaching and assessment in external quality assurance processes.</i>

The Spanish regulations governing the evaluation of academic programmes and higher education institutions — Royal Decree 822/2021 and Royal Decree 640/2021 — explicitly refer to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), ensuring that the evaluations carried out by quality assurance agencies are aligned with these European standards. Through REACU, the agencies design and approve the evaluation protocols to be used in each process. Based on these protocols, ACPUA incorporates in its assessment guides specific adaptations to the Aragonese University System (SUA), when necessary.

The Agency systematically integrates these standards into its evaluation protocols, ensuring that institutions' internal quality assurance systems (IQAS) are robust, effective, and continuously improved. Through programmes such as PACE-SGIC, DOCENTIA, and

²⁵ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/about-us>

institutional accreditation, ACPUA supports and certifies the implementation of IQAS in higher education institutions in Aragón. Furthermore, ACPUA's evaluation guides explicitly reference ESG Part 1 (see [Annex I. Translation of standards 1.1-1.10 into the ACPUA criteria and processes](#)), and the Agency promotes a quality culture that emphasizes student-centered learning, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based decision-making. These practices demonstrate ACPUA's strong commitment to the principles and expectations set out in ESG Part 1.

In addition to the evaluation processes linked to the national regulatory framework, ACPUA also develops its own evaluation protocols—such as the ALCAEUS programme—to address strategic priorities like sustainability.

Regarding the recommendation of the previous report, moreover, the agency has placed a special emphasis on addressing the proposal of the expert panel, applying various procedures to focus more on the student body, as already reflected in the follow-up report issued in 2023²⁶, including the following

- Student-Centred Learning in ALCAEUS: The ALCAEUS programme was revised to strengthen the focus on student-centred learning, especially in the teaching dimension.
- ACPUA + Students Programme: Student-centred learning is integrated into all evaluation activities. Students are trained, involved in governance, and supported through initiatives like the COVID Impact Forum.
- New University Guidance Infographic: ACPUA launched an infographic to help students in Aragón choose their academic path, offering resources on degrees, employability, and support services.

The correspondence of the ESG Part 1 criteria with the new activities (ALCAEUS programme and institutional re-accreditation programme) as well as with the PACE-SIGC programme updated in the evaluation period is presented below.

ALCAEUS programme²⁷

The ALCAEUS programme, following the recommendation of the expert panel of the 2021 assessment, includes a specific criterion (Criterion 4.2: Student centred learning. Learning outcomes) dedicated to how the school ensures student-centred learning and learning outcomes in relation to the 2030 Agenda.

DIMENSION	CRITERION	ESG ^{28, 29}
Dimension 1: STRATEGY, PARTNERSHIPS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	Criterion 1.1: Commitment and strategy of the centre	1.1 Quality Assurance Policy
	Criterion 1.2: Partnerships	
	Criterion 1.3: Internal and external recognitions	
Dimension 2: TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	Criterion 2.1: Public reporting	1.8 Public reporting
Dimension 3: INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM	Criterion 3.1: Quality processes and strategy	1.7 Information management 1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic evaluation of programmes
	Criterion 3.2: Staff responsible for the Internal Quality Assurance System	
Dimension 4: TEACHING	Criterion 4.1: Teaching strategy	1.2 Design and approval of programmes

²⁶ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/230605_acpua_follow_up_report.pdf (English)

²⁷ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/220624_alcaeus_protocol.pdf (English)

²⁸ The standard "1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification" is not evaluated in this programme. This criterion is addressed during the institutional accreditation process, which is a prerequisite for submitting this programme for evaluation.

²⁹ The standard "1.10 Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis" is considered in this programme, as obtaining the programme certification entails its renewal every six years.

DIMENSION	CRITERION	ESG ^{28, 29}
	Criterion 4.2: Student centred learning. Learning outcomes	1.3 Student-centred teaching, learning and assessment
Dimension 5: STAFF	Criterion 5.1: Responsible for training provision	1.5 Teaching staff
	Criterion 5.2: Teaching staff	
	Criterion 5.3: Administration and service staff	
Dimension 6: FINANCING AND RESOURCES	Criterion 6.1: Internal and/or external funding	1.6 Resources for learning and support of students
	Criterion 6.2: Resources	

Figure 13: ESG compliance Part 1 ALCAEUS programme

Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme³⁰

Figure 14 specifies the dimensions and criteria of the Institutional Accreditation Renewal protocol and their correspondence with the standards in Part 1.

DIMENSION	CRITERION	ESG ³¹
Dimension 0: CURRENT IQAS SITUATION	Criterion 0.1: IQAS management	1.1 Quality assurance policy
	Criterion 0.2: IQAS review and improvement	1.1 Quality assurance policy
Dimension 1: STRATEGIC PLANNING	Criterion 1.1: Strategic planning	1.1 Quality assurance policy
Dimension 2: DESIGN AND EVOLUTION OF TRAINING OFFERING	Criterion 2.1: Evolution of training provision	1.2 Programme design and approval
	Criterion 2.2: Design, review and update of training programmes	1.2 Programme design and approval 1.9. Continuous monitoring and regular evaluation of programmes
Dimension 3: DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES	Criterion 3.1: Pre-information, admission and enrolment processes	1.4 Admission, development, recognition and certification of learners 1.8 Public information
	Criterion 3.2: Student orientation	1.3 Learner-centred teaching, learning and assessment
	Criterion 3.3: Implementation of teaching, learning and assessment strategies	1.3 Learner-centred teaching, learning and assessment
Dimension 4: STAFF MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT	Criterion 4.1: Academic staff management	1.5 Teaching staff
	Criterion 4.2: Management of teaching support staff	1.6 Learning resources and support for learners
Dimension 5: MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES AND SERVICES	Criterion 5.1: Management of resources and services	1.6 Learning resources and support for learners
Dimension 6: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT	Criterion 6.1: Collection of generated information	1.7 Information management
Dimension 7: TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC INFORMATION	Criterion 7.1: Transparency, dissemination of activities and programmes and results	1.8 Public information
Dimension 8: R&D&I AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER	Criterion 8.1: R&D&I and knowledge transfer	All

Figure 14: ESG compliance Part 1 Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme

PACE -SIGC programme³²

Figure 15 shows the dimensions and criteria of the Assessment Protocol for the certification of IQAS implementation (PACE-SIGC Programme) and their correspondence with the standards of Part 1.

DIMENSION	CRITERION	ESG ³³
Dimension 1: QUALITY POLICY AND OBJECTIVES	Criterion 1.1: Establishing a quality culture	1.1 Quality assurance policy
Dimension 2: MANAGEMENT OF PROGRAMME DESIGN	Criterion 2.1: Quality assurance of training programmes	1.2 Programme design and approval
		1.9. Ongoing monitoring and regular

³⁰ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_institutional_accreditation_renewal_en.pdf (English)

³¹ The standard "1.10 Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis" is considered in this programme, as obtaining the programme certification entails its renewal every six years.

³² https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250526_prog_pace_doc_marc_en.v4.1.pdf (English)

³³ The standard "1.10 Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis" is considered in this programme, as obtaining the programme certification entails its renewal every six years.

DIMENSION	CRITERION	ESG ³³
		evaluation of programmes
Dimension 3: DELIVERY OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES	Criterion 3.1: Orientation of its teaching to the student body	1.4 Admission, development, recognition and certification of students
		1.3 Student-centred teaching, learning and evaluation
Dimension 4: ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT OF ACADEMIC AND TEACHING SUPPORT STAFF	Criterion 4.1: Assurance and enhancement of its academic and teaching support staff	1.5 Teaching staff
Dimension 5: ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT OF MATERIAL RESOURCES AND SERVICES	Criterion 5.1: Guarantee and improvement of material resources and services	1.6 Resources for learning and student support
Dimension 6: OUTCOMES. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT	Criterion 6.1: Compilation of the information generated	1.7 Information management
	Criterion 6.2: Analysis of information and results	1.7 Information management
	Criterion 6.3: Decision-making	1.7 Information management
Dimension 7: TRANSPARENCY, DISSEMINATION OF ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES AND RESULTS	Criterion 7.1: Transparency, dissemination of activities and programmes and results	1.8 Public information
Dimension 8: R&D&I AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER	Criterion 8.1: R&D&I and knowledge transfer	All

Figure 15: ESG compliance Part 1 PACE-SIGC programme

FINAL CRITICAL REFLECTION ON STANDARD 2.1

As explained above, the new ACPUA external quality assurance activities and the modification of the existing one (PACE-SIGC programme) effectively address the institutions' internal quality assurance processes, as required by Part 1 of the ESG.

In addition, in direct response to the recommendations of the 2021 Report, ACPUA has taken steps to enhance its protocols with a focus on student engagement.

As will be shown in the following section and in the specific section on strategic planning, student-centred learning remains a key priority for the agency's objectives in the coming years.

5.2. Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

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.

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Commendation: *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.*

Suggestions for future development: *The group suggests that ACPUA prioritise the development of a methodology for institutional follow up accreditation geared towards supporting university centers in quality enhancement and thus enhancing the overall fitness-for-purpose of the institutional accreditation system, and a methodology for joint programme review consistent with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.*

Although ACPUA did not receive recommendations from ENQA in relation to this standard, in keeping with the usual way of developing new evaluation processes in the agency, as commended by the panel, and following the suggestion for future development, ACPUA has

sought new ways to integrate all stakeholders in the development of its evaluation programmes. The following explains how this has been done in the design of each of the new activities launched or modified since the previous evaluation.

ALCAEUS programme

The design of this protocol was preceded by an experimental and highly innovative process of consultation and participation with internal and external stakeholders in Aragon and Andorra.

The ALCAEUS programme arose from ACPUA's participation in the project "Making connections between the Institutional Evaluation and the Sustainable Development Goals". During the 2017/2018 academic year, the "International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education" (INQAAHE) awarded one of its two "Capacity Building" grants for the joint development of this project with the Agència de Qualitat de l'ensenyament superior d'Andorra (AQUA), which acted as coordinator of the project. The project, which ran for one year (from May 2018 to April 2019), involved the main stakeholders linked to higher education and sustainability in Andorra and Aragon (see Figure 16).

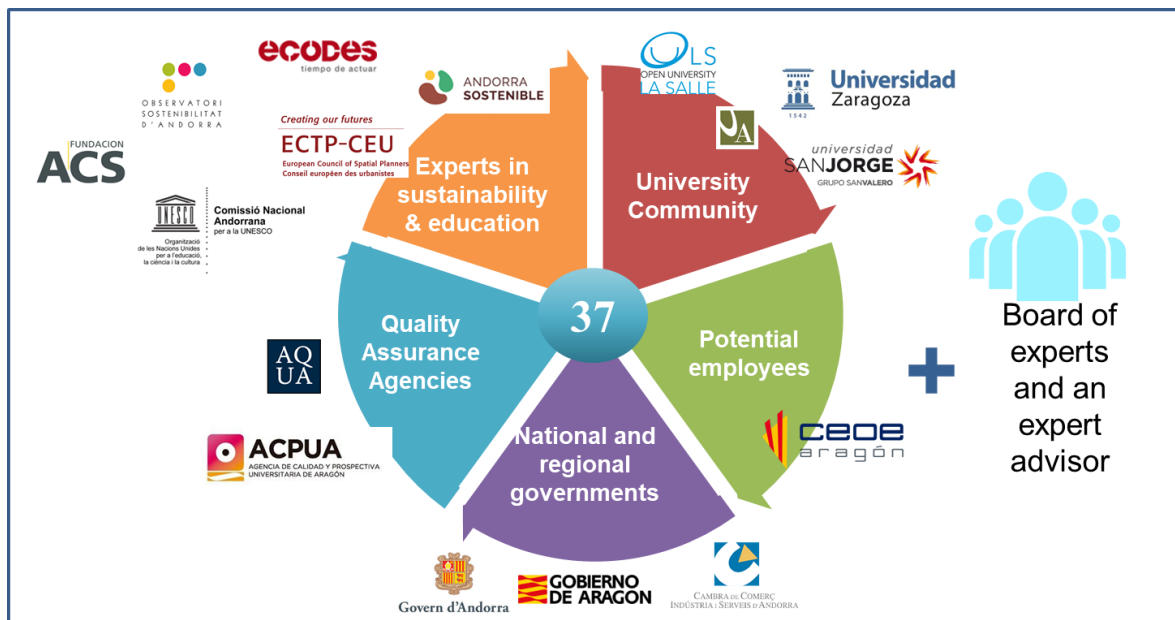


Figure 16: Stakeholders of the INQAAHE project

The main objective of the project was to align quality management in higher education with the SDGs and to empower stakeholders in our university systems.

In this way, through participatory processes of joint reflection and diagnostic analysis, a proposal for indicators for the integration of the SDGs in institutional quality assessment was developed, drafted and published in 2019³⁴.

Protocol design.

Based on this proposal for indicators, an evaluation protocol was developed and sent at the end of 2019 to evaluation and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) experts, to two of the students who had participated in the drafting of the previous document proposal for indicators and to the universities, in order to obtain their proposals for improvement. Once the comments were received, the CECA approved the first version of the ALCAEUS

³⁴https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/propuesta_indicadores_proyecto_inqahe-acpua.pdf

programme at its meeting on 11 March 2020.

Pilot evaluation, meta-evaluation and protocol improvements.

The pilot experience was carried out with two centres, and after the certification of both, a meta-evaluation process was carried out through consultation with the experts who formed part of the panels, the Institutions Evaluation Committee (SEC), the management teams of the certified centres and the Vice-rectorate for Academic Policy of the University of Zaragoza. As a result of this meta-evaluation, some modifications were made to the evaluation protocol, taking into account the results of the initial experience and the opinion of the participants in the process (evaluated and evaluators).

Based on the assessments that appear in the "ENQA Agency Review" report, corresponding to the second evaluation of ACPUA, dated 24 June 2021, specifically those related to ESG 3.1, in which the panel congratulates ACPUA for developing ALCAEUS as a pioneering evaluation scheme and following the proposals for improvement collected during the meta-evaluation process, the following changes were introduced in the protocol:

- The changes introduced by Royal Decree 822/2021 of 28 September, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance, were taken into account. Article 4 of this decree includes the SDGs as guiding principles in the design of curricula for official university degrees.
- A complement to the certification was added, allowing the centre to indicate, in the self-assessment report, its special commitment to a maximum of three SDGs that would be verified by ACPUA.
- Voluntary monitoring in the period between certifications was included, which would consist of the centres submitting a self-assessment report that includes the progress, improvements or changes introduced in the centre that could mean a change in the level of certification. This report would be reviewed by the ACPUA Institutions Evaluation Committee which, in the event of detecting significant changes, may suggest that the centre submit a new application for certification in order to raise the level of the certificate.
- The composition of the evaluation panel is made up of at least one academic, one student and one professional. One member of the panel will chair the panel and an ACPUA technician will act as secretary with voice but without vote. The selection will be based on the requirements defined in the "ACPUA Evaluator Selection Procedure" published on the agency's website, taking into account the specialisation in SDGs and always having an international profile.
- The scope of certification is restricted to faculties and schools (research centres are eliminated).
- Dimension 4: TEACHING was simplified. Both experts and institutions pointed out the difficulty of assessing the dimension because of the level of detail proposed in the assessment guidelines. In the current approach, the existence of a teaching strategy designed to focus the learning process on the student ("student centred learning"), so as to ensure that the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) related to the SDGs defined by the school are achieved, is valued.
- A condition for applying for the programme that the centres be accredited by an EQAR-registered quality agency through a procedure aligned with the ESG was included. This condition was checked with EQAR, which gave its approval to this requirement on 30 September 2022, in line with the process of substantial

modification initiated by ACPUA to include the ALCAEUS programme as an evaluation activity under the ESG.

Programme dissemination.

ACPUA's ALCAEUS programme has continued to attract interest and the agency has been invited to present it at various forums over the past five years:

- Presentation of ALCAEUS to the agency AQU Catalunya.
- Presentation of ALCAEUS to the agencies ANVUR (Italy) and AVEPRO (Holy See)³⁵.
- Presentation of ALCAEUS for INQAAHE on the occasion of its Anniversary Celebration (on-site event, Aula Magna of the University of Barcelona)³⁶.
- Presentation of ALCAEUS at the *IV Annual Eurasian Forum on Quality Assurance*.
- Presentation of ALCAEUS at the ENQA Seminar for recently reviewed agencies (Cologne, Germany).
- Presentation of ALCAEUS at the I International Scientific Meeting on Healthy Organisations (Healthyorg) in Zaragoza³⁷.
- SEFI: 50th Annual Conference of the European Society for Engineering Education. Paper: Demonstrating the commitment of Engineering Schools to the achievement of the SDGs: The ALCAEUS / Agenda 2030 Assessment Programme. A case study³⁸.
- Article "Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible, objetivo de las universidades", written by the director of the agency and published in the magazine ESPACIOS de Educación Superior³⁹.
- ALCAEUS online presentation at the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) held in Timisoara⁴⁰.
- Presentation of the new Observatory for the 2030 Agenda of the Faculty of Education of the University of Zaragoza. ACPUA participated in person in the round table discussion "The 2030 Agenda and its incursion into the university reality".
- XII Conference of Universities Quality Technical Units. ACPUA was invited to present the ALCAEUS programme at the table on the integration of the SDGs⁴¹.
- III Ibero-American Seminar on Quality in Online Education organised by the Organisation of Ibero-American States (OEI) under the subtitle "Empowering Excellence with Artificial Intelligence", held in online format in Panama⁴².
- International event "Accreditation, standards and education for the future" organised by the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI), an organisation linked to UNESCO. Participation was in online format⁴³.

³⁵ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/noticias/30-september-2021-international-workshop-third-mission-transfer-and-social-impact>

³⁶ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/noticias/acpua-gives-inqahe-workshop-barcelona-sustainability-and-spreads-its-alcaeus-program>

³⁷ <https://acpua.aragon.es/es/noticias/presentacion-del-programa-alcaeus-cursos-extraordinarios-de-la-universidad-de-zaragoza>

³⁸ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/2022.proceedingssefi20221829-1834_1.pdf

³⁹ <https://www.espaciosdeeducacionsuperior.es/10/11/2022/los-objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible-objetivo-de-las-universidades/>

⁴⁰ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/noticias/eqaf-2022-acpua-presents-new-version-alcaeusagenda-2030>

⁴¹ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/xii-conference-technical-quality-units>

⁴² <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/iii-iberoamerican-seminar-quality-online-education>

⁴³ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/acpua-participates-hesi-event-invitation-inqahe>

Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme

New activity with students: Workshop on co-creation of an evaluation tool.

ACPUA sought the participation of the student body in the design of the protocol for the Institutional Accreditation Renewal. To this end, two co-creation workshops were held to develop a tool that would serve to gather feedback from the student body and constitute an additional source of information for the evaluation panel.

The main objective of this initiative was to give a voice to this group so that they could define both the topics they considered interesting to be reviewed by the experts during the evaluation, as well as the most suitable tool to collect the students' opinions on these topics.

The sessions took place in each of the centres evaluated at the end of 2024, as part of the first "pilot" application of this evaluation. Both sessions were coordinated by two people from the agency with experience in group facilitation and in citizen participation and innovation techniques. Both people acted as observers while promoting and coordinating the debate among the students.

The activity was attended by 20 students from the 2nd to 4th year of undergraduate and 1st year of master's degree courses from the different degrees of the two university centres. Specifically, 8 students from the School of Engineering and Architecture (EINA) and 12 from the Higher Polytechnic School of Huesca (EPSH) participated, with a distribution of 35% women and 65% men.

The sessions were based on a collaborative debate. Firstly, the participants were divided into tables of 3 or 4 people who discussed 2 key questions:

- Question 1.- What aspects do you think are essential to evaluate your centre? Prioritisation of topics.
- Question 2.- What do you think is the best method for students to evaluate their school? Prioritisation of tools.

At the end of the group discussions, the conclusions of each round table were shared. After the two workshops, two people volunteered to act as group coordinators, who were responsible for summarising all the contributions collected. The role of the coordinators, a man and a woman, was fundamental for the synthesis of the work of their colleagues, writing up their conclusions in the publication ACPUA Aprende n°13⁴⁴.

Pilot evaluation, meta-evaluation and protocol improvements.

After the implementation of the first evaluation for the Institutional Accreditation Renewal in the University System of Aragon carried out on the two aforementioned centres of the University of Zaragoza, ACPUA conducted the meta-evaluation of the process in December 2024, implementing the following actions:

- Gathering the satisfaction of the participants (panel members and staff of the centres) and their proposals for improvement through the application of surveys.
- Online meta-evaluation meeting in which the process was reviewed with representatives of the centres and the panels. In addition, the two coordinators of the student body participating in the co-creation workshops participated and presented the results of the workshops.

⁴⁴https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/la_acpua_aprende_13_cocreation_workshop.pdf

Having analysed all the information gathered through the above actions, the following modifications were approved by the Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation Commission (CECA) on 31 January 2025:

- The visit to the centre will always be face-to-face (with the possibility of an online session if the centre and the panel consider it appropriate) and its duration will be established according to the number of programmes implemented in the centre.
- A new tool (eBox) is included as a result of the co-creation workshop.
- The self-assessment report template is modified to allow institutions to briefly explain the evidence of how they comply with each of the guidelines.

Furthermore, it was clear from both the meta-evaluation session and the responses to the surveys that this is a complex process that requires significant dedication from all participants. Therefore, the evaluations will be planned annually, ensuring adequate time for the preparation of the self-assessment report and the site visit, as well as for the work of the evaluation panel, both before and after the site visit.

From the surveys and the meta-evaluation session, it can be concluded that all the participants in the process showed their satisfaction with the process and the results, valuing very positively the usefulness of the process and the performance of ACPUA.

PACE -SIGC programme

As mentioned in the previous section, the publication of the Resolution of 3 March 2022 made it necessary to revise the PACE-SIGC programme. The changes did not affect the substance of the evaluation, it was only necessary to redistribute the evaluation criteria in accordance with the national regulations and to include Doctoral Schools in the scope of the programme. In the case of ACPUA, in addition, the Schools of Higher Artistic Education are also included.

Since these modifications were mandated by national legislation, they did not stem from an internal review or redesign process. Therefore, it was not necessary to involve stakeholders in the development of the revised protocol. Instead, ACPUA focused its efforts on informing and supporting institutions through various dissemination and training sessions to ensure a smooth implementation of the changes:

- 25 May 2022 - Training of internal auditors UNIZAR⁴⁵
To assist the University of Zaragoza in the certification process of its centres under the PACE-SIGC programme, ACPUA participated on 25 May 2022 in a training day for internal auditors of Quality Assurance Systems implemented in the University of Zaragoza's centres, organised by the Vice-Rectorate for Academic Policy.
- September 2024 - Technical area meeting with the quality units of both universities⁴⁶
To keep the SUA universities updated on REACU's work and the impact of the ongoing regulatory changes on the various ACPUA programmes, ACPUA technicians visited both universities and met with their quality units.
- 24 January 2025 - Training action at the Ecole Supérieure de Design⁴⁷

Considering the inclusion of arts schools within the protocol's scope, ACPUA conducted a training session at the School of Design—the first school expressing

⁴⁵ <https://inspecciongeneral.unizar.es/noticias/jornada-de-formacion-de-audidores-internos>

⁴⁶ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/launching-activities-academic-year-2024-2025-meetings-technical-team-acpua-quality-units-uz-and-usj>

⁴⁷ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/iacs-training-sessions-esda>

interest in preparing its Internal Quality Assurance System for certification by ACPUA.

FINAL CRITICAL REFLECTION IN RELATION TO STANDARD 2.2

ACPUA demonstrates a strong commitment to ESG Standard 2.2 by designing “fit for purpose” methodologies that actively involve all stakeholders. This participatory approach ensures processes meet their objectives and fosters continuous improvement, as recognised by the ENQA panel in 2021.

The ALCAEUS programme exemplifies this, combining innovation and collaboration from development through to refinement after pilot and meta-evaluations.

Including the student body in designing the Institutional Accreditation Renewal protocol is a significant step in ensuring all voices are heard. The co-created tools for gathering student feedback enhance legitimacy and reinforce a student-centred focus, key ESG principles.

ACPUA’s dissemination efforts and proactive response to regulatory changes show strategic management focused on continuous improvement and building trust.

In summary, ACPUA sets a strong example in designing and updating “fit for purpose” methodologies, aligned with ENQA recommendations and international standards, distinguished by stakeholder integration, innovation, and regulatory adaptability.

5.3. Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

External quality assurance processes must 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 and a consistent follow-up.

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Suggestions for future development: *The panel encourages ACPUA to consider conducting a site visit as part of initial accreditation reviews of programmes designed by centres which have not yet successfully undergone an IQAS certification review. Further to the suggestion under ESG 2.2, the panel encourages ACPUA to pursue vigorously its efforts to design methodologies for new processes based on the four stages as recommended under ESG 2.3.*

Although ACPUA did not receive any formal recommendations from ENQA regarding this standard, in response to the panel’s suggestion for future development, the CECA incorporated a new measure into the review of the Initial Accreditation Programme for degrees at the end of 2022. Specifically, the Evaluation Committees by field of knowledge (CER) were given the option to hold a videoconference with the university teams proposing new degrees, particularly in cases where the innovative nature of the proposals warranted further discussion. This measure does not introduce changes to the evaluation protocol; it only allows for interaction between the CER and the team proposing the degree in exceptional cases.⁴⁸

As summarised in Figure 18, all the ACPUA's evaluation processes comply with the four steps recommended in ESG 2.3, namely:

- The documentation of the evaluation processes is designed around the indications of the agency's Internal Quality Assurance System and its process map⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/221122_prog_ver_gr_ms_v.o.pdf

⁴⁹ <https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/mapaprosesowebeng2.jpg>

- The implementation is coherent and replicates its protocols consistently, ensuring at all times the elimination of external biases that would prejudice the evaluation process.
- All assessment guides or protocols specify the requirement for a self-assessment report, an external evaluation, and a face-to-face or virtual visit by experts. These steps are followed by the issuance of a final report and the monitoring of recommendations. The documents also include the composition of the assessment bodies, the assessment criteria, and a summary table detailing the history of modifications made.
- The face-to-face nature of visits changed in 2020 due to the outbreak of the pandemic. The agency quickly developed an effective and reliable system for virtual visits, which, in some cases—given the regional agency’s in-depth knowledge of its two universities—is still in use today. Virtual visits are employed in the evaluation of the quality assurance systems of centres and, in certain cases, for programme accreditation—specifically from the second or third accreditation cycle, and only for programmes with no areas under special follow-up in previous reports.
- When visits are conducted via videoconference, the panel has access to all documentation prior to the visit and prepares the agenda and list of groups to be interviewed, with the support of the agency. The agency coordinates with the university to ensure that the panel’s requirements are met. This ensures that the panel of experts can interview all stakeholders it deems necessary. All evaluation processes conclude with a report, approved by the corresponding Evaluation Committee (SET or SEC), which is published on the agency’s website⁵⁰ as well as in the Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR)⁵¹.

QA Processes	SAR	External assessment	Site visit	Results report	Follow up	Observations
EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMES						
Study programme initial accreditation	Yes	CER	Yes*	SET	Yes	(*) NEW (2022): Visit at the request of the CER if necessary
Study programme accreditation	Yes	Review panel	Yes	SET	Yes	
Study programme follow-up	Yes	Follow up committee	Yes*	SET	Yes	(*) Site visit takes place if the positive outcome of the accreditation has been linked to the submission of an improvement plan.

Figure 17: Evaluation processes – Study programmes

QA Processes	SAR	External assessment	Site visit	Results report	Follow up	Observations
EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONS						
PACE-SIGC programme	Yes	Review	Yes	SEC	Yes	

⁵⁰<https://acpua.aragon.es/en/inquiry-reports>

⁵¹https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/by-report/?ordering=created_at&limit=20&id=&agency=4&country=&status=&crossborder=&activity_type=&activity=&decision=&language=&programme_type=&other_provider_covered=&valid=

QA Processes	SAR	External assessment	Site visit	Results report	Follow up	Observations
EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONS						
(IQAS Certification)		panel				
Institutional accreditation	Yes	SEC	Yes*	SEC	Yes	(*) The initial institutional accreditation is based on the certification of the implementation of the IQAS of the center (PACE-SIGC programme) and the renewal of the accreditation of the programmes. Both processes require a visit.
Institutional Accreditation Renewal (Institutional Follow-up Accreditation)	Yes	Review panel	Yes	SEC	Yes	
Certification SDG/Agenda 2030 (ALCAEUS programme)	Yes	Review panel	Yes	SEC	Yes	
Higher education institutions initial accreditation	Yes	Review panel	NO*	SEC	NO**	(*) No visits are made because is new centers. (**) The centers are included in the external evaluation processes determined by the legislation in force.
Partner HEI evaluation	Yes	SEC	Yes	SEC	NO*	(*) It is the Government of Aragon that requests periodic feasibility reports if it considers it necessary.
Training schools accreditation	Yes	SEC	NO*	SEC	Yes	(*) The programme does not include visits to the centers because the certification is based on the evaluation reports for the renewal of the accreditation and the monitoring of the Degrees in Teaching in Early Childhood Education and Teaching in Secondary Education and the Master's Degree in Teaching.
Teaching activity evaluation system audit (DOCENTIA Programme)	Yes	Review panel	Yes	SEC	Yes	
Teaching staff evaluation system audit	Yes	SEC	NO*	SEC	NO**	(*) This is a process with special characteristics that does not require a visit, nor does it require a follow-up since it is a process that is repeated annually.

Figure 18: Evaluation processes - Institutional evaluation

As for the new activities introduced or modified in the reporting period, all three comply with all elements of standard 2.3 as stated in the documentation of each of the programmes.

ALCAEUS programme

The full assessment procedure is detailed in section 4 of the assessment protocol published on the website⁵².

Institutional Accreditation Renewal

The full assessment procedure is detailed in section 5 of the assessment protocol published on the website⁵³.

PACE -SIGC programme

The full assessment procedure is detailed in section 6 of the assessment protocol published on the website⁵⁴.

FINAL CRITICAL REFLECTION ON STANDARD 2.3

⁵²https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/220624_alcaeus_protocol.pdf

⁵³https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_institutional_accreditation_renewal_en.pdf

⁵⁴https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250526_prog_pace_doc_marc_en.v4.1.pdf

ACPUA designs all its protocols by establishing a rigorous evaluation procedure that covers all the phases required by European standards.

The trend within the SUA is for all centres from both universities to achieve institutional accreditation, making the Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme the evaluation activity with the greatest impact on the system in the coming years.

As mentioned above, this programme evaluates the centres, their internal quality assurance systems, and their degree programmes. A face-to-face visit by the evaluation panel is vital to this process. During this visit, all groups and individuals related to the institution are heard through a combination of scheduled interviews and open hearings. Additionally, the visit includes a tour of the centre's facilities and the collection of student feedback via the new eBox tool (a questionnaire ad hoc for students to answer before the site visit).

The Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme is a highly valuable tool for ACPUA because of the detailed knowledge it provides about the University System of Aragon.

5.4. Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

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

ENQA AGENCY REVIEW 2021
Commendation: <i>The panel commends ACPUA for involving international experts in all programme reaccreditation reviews.</i>
Suggestion for future development: <i>As ACPUA is refocusing its activities towards institutional accreditation, the panel encourages it to consider involving international experts in IQAS certification reviews.</i>
EQAR REPORT 2021
Partial compliance: <i>As ACPUA is not involving student's perspective in some of its activities, the Register Committee was unable to concur with the panel's conclusion, but found the agency to be partially compliant with the standard.</i>

The agency includes students in all bodies and evaluation panels involved in assessment processes under the ESG.

In a previous evaluation, EQAR found the agency to be partially compliant with the standard due to the absence of student participation in the Higher Education Institutions Initial Accreditation Programme. In response to the comments made by the EQAR Register Committee in 2021, the CECA of ACPUA addressed this issue during its meeting on 31 January 2024. It was agreed that evaluation panels for the Higher Education Institutions Initial Accreditation Programme—similar to other programmes that establish ad hoc panels—include a student representative. To ensure the necessary competencies for assessing the criteria outlined in the evaluation protocol, this representative should be a doctoral student⁵⁵.

Furthermore, the inclusion of students in evaluation panels has been strengthened by their introduction in the evaluation of university research institutes (a process outside the scope of the ESGs)⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_prog_cre_cent_ads_v8.o_en.pdf

⁵⁶ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_documento_marco_evperiuvs_v.3_en.pdf

For ACPUA, selecting the most suitable experts for each process is important. This commitment materialised with the updating of its Bank of Evaluators⁵⁷. To support this, in 2023, economic and human resources were allocated to design a new software application, significantly improving the speed of recruiting suitable national and international profiles for evaluation processes.

Since 2020, the agency has also had a regulation⁵⁸ for the selection of evaluators. To avoid conflicts of interest, experts sign the agency's Code of Ethics,⁵⁹ and the composition of panels is sent to universities, which may challenge experts for justified reasons. Notably, no challenges have been received.

Regarding the praise and recommendations for future development from the ENQA panel, ACPUA continues to include international evaluators on all its panels. The composition of all evaluation panels during the period is available in the agency's activity reports⁶⁰.

With regard to the new activities, the composition of the panels as set out in the documents of each programme is given below.

ALCAEUS programme

The evaluation panels of the ALCAEUS programme are made up of five experts in Agenda 2030/sustainability, including at least one academic, one student and one professional profile. From among the members of the panel, the CECA will select the person who will chair the panel. The secretariat will be held by a person from the technical area of ACPUA. The requirements defined in the "ACPUA Evaluator Selection Procedure" published on the agency's website will be followed, taking into account the specialisation in SDGs and having an international profile in every panel⁶¹. An example of a panel for this programme is shown in Figure 19.

PROFILE	NAME	SURNAMES	INSTITUTION	EXPERIENCE
CHAIRPERSON	Monserrat	Zamorano Toro	University of Granada	Professor of Civil Engineering. Research in environmental technologies.
ACADEMIC SPOKESPERSON	Elvira	Congosto Luna	Complutense University of Madrid	Researcher in the evaluation of the quality of institutions. Assessor for ANECA and other agencies and bodies.
STUDENT MEMBER	Andrea	Fernández Gorgojo	Carlos III University of Madrid	PhD on Composite Materials Recycling. ACPUA Evaluator.
PROFESSIONAL VOWEL	Elena	De Mier Torrecilla	AECID - ACS Foundation (Madrid)	ACPUA evaluator. Participant in the INQAAHE project on SDGs.
INTERNATIONAL SPOKESPERSON	Pieter-Jan	Van de Velde	Trividend (Belgium)	Quality Expert. ENQA Assessor.

Figure 19: Example of an ALCAEUS expert panel

Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme

In the programme for the Institutional Accreditation Renewal, the composition of the panel will be as follows: two academics belonging to the branch of knowledge to which the degree programmes of the applicant institution predominantly belong (one of them will act as chairperson), one expert in quality assurance systems, one professional and one student. As far as possible, an attempt will be made to match one of the above profiles with an international expert⁶². The panel will be accompanied by a technician appointed by ACPUA

⁵⁷ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/pool-reviewers-experts>

⁵⁸ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/200717_pro_sel_eva_en.pdf

⁵⁹ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/240304_cod_eti_en.pdf

⁶⁰ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/strategy>

⁶¹ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/220624_alcaeus_protocol.pdf

⁶² https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_institutional_accr_ditation_renewal_en.pdf

who will act as secretary of the panel with voice but without vote. Figure 20 shows, as an example, the composition of a panel in this programme.

PROFILE	NAME	SURNAMES	INSTITUTION	EXPERIENCE
CHAIRPERSON	Elena	Valderrama Vallés	Autonomous University of Barcelona	Professor, Department of Microelectronics and Electronic Systems. President of the ACPUA Engineering and Architecture CER.
ACADEMIC SPOKESPERSON	Felipe	Jiménez Alonso	Polytechnic University of Madrid	Professor of Industrial Engineering. Experience in degree evaluation with ACSUG and ACCUEE.
PROFESSIONAL VOWEL	Manuel	Pina Gómez	ZALUX	Sustainability Director. Industrial Engineer, Master in Innovation Management.
SIGC EXPERT	Javier	González Benito	University of Salamanca	Professor in the Department of Business Administration and Economics. President of the SEC of ACPUA.
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MEMBER	Irene	Bonet Gómez	Institut National des Sciences Appliquées. INSA Toulouse	Degree in Civil Engineering.

Figure 20: Example of an Institutional Accreditation Renewal expert panel

PACE -SIGC programme

In the PACE - SIGC programme, the panel will be made up of five experts in quality management. Specifically, it will be composed of an academic preferably belonging to the branch of knowledge to which the degrees of the applicant institution predominantly belong (who will act as chairman), a professional and a student. The panel will be accompanied by a technician appointed by ACPUA who will act as secretary of the panel with voice but without vote⁶³. Figure 21 shows an example of a panel for this programme.

	NAME	SURNAMES	INSTITUTION	EXPERIENCE
President	José Ángel	Domínguez Pérez	University of Salamanca	Faculty of Science. Dept. of Mathematics. Former Vice-Rector for Teaching, Academic Policy and Promotion and Coordination of the University of Salamanca. Former Director ACSUCYL.
Academic Member	Rosa Mª	Martínez Espinosa	University of Alicante	Faculty of Science. Vice-Rector for International Relations and Development Cooperation. Teaching Master's Degree, Biochemistry, Initiation to Research in Biology. Assessment experience: ANECA.
Student Member	Julen	Astigarraga Urcelay	University of Alcalá	PhD student, Dept. of Life Sciences. Ecology, Conservation and Restoration of Ecosystems Programme. Evaluating experience: ACSUCYL (ELENCHOS).
Professional Member	Sonia	Corujo Capote	Las Palmas de Gran Canaria University	Quality Technician in Higher Education. Assessment experience: ANECA (AUDIT).
International Member	Carmel	Kelly	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)	Director of accreditation at the QQI quality agency.

Figure 21: Example of a PACE-SIGC expert panel

FINAL CRITICAL REFLECTION ON STANDARD 2.4

ACPUA, in response to the partial compliance reported by EQAR, continues to integrate the student perspective in its evaluation procedures. It has taken steps to strengthen student participation in its panels and technical bodies, including in those procedures that are not formally regulated by the ESG.

Similarly, the agency has heeded ENQA's recommendation regarding the participation of international evaluators in Institutional Accreditation Renewal processes, recognising that

⁶³https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250526_prog_pace_doc_marc_en.v4.1.pdf

this practice contributes to reinforcing the objectivity, diversity and international projection of evaluations. This willingness to openness is complemented by structural improvements, such as the updating of the Bank of Evaluators and the publication of detailed regulations for their selection, which strengthens the quality and transparency of the system.

In short, the evolution of ACPUA reflects a firm commitment to continuous improvement and complete receptiveness to external recommendations. By including key stakeholders such as students and international experts in all evaluation bodies and panels, ACPUA not only complies with regulatory requirements, but also enriches the evaluation process by providing it with a plural and inclusive perspective.

5.5. Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

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.

Neither the ENQA Agency Review 2021 nor the final EQAR decision made any recommendations, commendations or suggestions for future development. In general, all ACPUA protocols clearly specify how the results of both the desk study and the interviews should be evidenced. The agency has sufficient mechanisms in place to ensure systematic and consistent evaluation and, consequently, reliable and robust results. These mechanisms include:

- The evaluation protocols, which are published on the website, contain a detailed description of the assessment criteria.
- Careful selection of the most suitable profiles to act as evaluators.
- Specific training for evaluators prior to the start of the process. Each protocol includes its own training, and in all cases instruction is given on the clear and consistent collection of evidence.
- Produce comprehensive reports organised by criteria, ensuring that all panel members participate in the assessment of all dimensions.
- Consensus meeting in which the experts jointly discuss the evidence gathered during the assessment and agree on the text of the proposal report to be submitted to the relevant Evaluation Committee (SET o SEC).
- Review, by the Evaluation Committee, of each proposal report made by a panel. The Evaluation Committee reviews the drafting of the report, ensuring consistency and uniformity in the application of the criteria by the different evaluation panels within the same process.
- Sending of the proposed report to the university and opening of a period for allegations.
- Review of the allegations by the evaluation panel and issuing of the proposed final report.
- Issuance of the final report by the relevant Evaluation Committee in view of the proposal for the final report of the evaluation panel.

Both the evaluation panels and the Evaluation Committee have a person from ACPUA who acts as secretary, with voice but without vote, whose main role is to coordinate the process (planning the work of the panel, managing the consensus meeting and deadline control, managing the visit and the exchange of information between the panel and the university).

This person ensures the correct application of the criteria throughout the evaluation.

As for the new activities, all three have the mechanisms described in the previous paragraph, which are described in the documents of each process.

ALCAEUS programme

The evaluation report will include both a quantitative and qualitative assessment of each criterion, along with a proposed final score that determines the certification level of the centre. The report may also include recommendations for improving the score obtained, as well as highlight good practices identified during the evaluation. The overall score will establish the certification level, which will be valid for six years.

In its application, the center may identify up to 3 SDGs to which the center is particularly committed. The panel will check, with the evidence provided, the centre's effective commitment to the SDGs stated in the self-report. These SDGs will be reflected in the final certificate.

LEVEL 0	Without certificate	Scoring: 0-24% Score: 0-24	Incipient commitment to the Agenda 2030
LEVEL 1	BRONZE	Score: 25-49%.	On the road to the 2030 Agenda
LEVEL 2	SILVER	Score: 50-74%.	Commitment to Agenda 2030
LEVEL 3	GOLD	Score: 75-100%.	Flagship and reference centre international

The corresponding evaluation reports issued will be published on the ACPUA website and in the European DEQAR Register database.

See section 4 on the evaluation process in the ALCAEUS framework document⁶⁴.

Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme

The final evaluation report, which will be FAVOURABLE or UNFAVOURABLE for the renewal of institutional accreditation. The issuing of a favourable report will be associated with the renewal of the IACS implementation certificate according to the PACE programme, with the same effective date.

In the event that the Council of Universities issues a rejection decision, the university centre involved must request the renewal of the corresponding accreditation for each of the official degrees it offers, within the period established in relation to the start of their activity or the last renewal of accreditation, as well as the certification of its IQAS.

The reports will be published on the Agency's website and in the DEQAR database. In addition, the agency will maintain on the website the updated register of institutions with institutional accreditation and the register of institutions with implemented IACS.

See section 5 on the evaluation process in the institutional accreditation renewal programme framework document⁶⁵.

PACE -SIGC programme

The final evaluation report, which will be either FAVOURABLE or UNFAVOURABLE regarding the certification of the IACS implementation, will determine whether the system is certified

⁶⁴ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/220624_alcaeus_protocol.pdf

⁶⁵ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_institutional_accreditation_renewal_en.pdf

for a period of six years, renewable for successive periods of the same duration.

These reports will be published on the Agency’s website, which will maintain an up-to-date register of certified sites and the validity of their certifications. Additionally, the reports will be made available in the DEQAR database.

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See section 6 on the evaluation process in the PACE-SIGC framework document⁶⁶.

FINAL CRITICAL REFLECTION ON STANDARD 2.5

Overall, we consider that the procedure followed by ACPUA in the evaluation processes shows a high degree of systematisation, transparency and methodological rigour, in line with the fundamental principles of external quality assurance, as can be deduced from the fact that neither ENQA nor EQAR issued recommendations in relation to this standard.

At ACPUA we believe that key factors are the clarity of the protocols, the specific training of the evaluators, the consensual drafting of the reports and the performance of the Evaluation Committees. We consider that the presence of a person from ACPUA as secretary in all the panels and bodies is a good practice that helps to give coherence to the processes.

We consider the absence of appeals and complaints submitted to our Appeals Committee as a strong indication that the agency applies its published criteria consistently and transparently, in line with the standard. This suggests that stakeholders perceive the outcomes and judgments resulting from external quality assurance processes as fair and well-founded.

5.6. Standard 2.6 Reporting

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.

ENQA AGENCY REVIEW 2021
<p>Recommendation: <i>The panel recommends that ACPUA continue its efforts to ensure that reports of all evaluation processes provide sufficient evidence and analysis to substantiate judgements, 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 (The panel recommends that ACPUA bridge the gaps in its internal quality assurance system by closing 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).</i></p>
<p>Suggestions for future development: <i>Where the full review panel reports contain more valuable information than the final reports produced by the Evaluation Committees, the panel encourages ACPUA to consider publishing them along with final reports of the Committees which are currently on its website.</i></p>

In response to the standard and the recommendation in the ENQA report, ACPUA has intensified its efforts to ensure the quality, clarity and accessibility of evaluation reports. The agency is committed to ensuring that these reports include rigorous analysis and sufficient evidence to provide a sound basis for the judgements made. All the reports are published on

⁶⁶ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250526_prog_pace_doc_marc_en.v4.1.pdf

the ACPUA website⁶⁷ and DEQAR⁶⁸.

In all the agency's evaluation processes, a proposal report is issued prior to the final report. Institutions are given the opportunity to submit allegations or comments on this proposal. These are carefully considered by the evaluation bodies before the final report is issued.

The systematisation of the structure of the reports seeks to ensure their coherence and homogeneity by ensuring that each of the dimensions assessed is addressed consistently in the proposal and final reports. This structured approach also facilitates understanding by the institutions and the general public. To this end, the agency pays special attention to designing, together with each evaluation protocol, a specific guide for the preparation of the self-assessment report to be submitted by the evaluated institution. This guide not only supports the institutions in the self-assessment report, but also serves as a common reference for the panels of experts, thus ensuring a shared interpretation of the criteria and a wording aligned with the objectives of the process.

In addition, the training of evaluators includes a specific module on how to write clear, synthetic and evidence-based judgements for each dimension assessed. This training helps to ensure that the resulting reports present only the relevant and necessary information. The result is a single comprehensive, clear and substantiated report that accurately reflects the objectives and findings of the evaluation.

With regard to the recommendation concerning the publication of reports, ACPUA has maintained a policy of transparency since its inception, ensuring the dissemination of both positive and negative reports on its website and through DEQAR. In line with the suggestion for future development issued by ENQA, it must be said that in general, there are no differences between the reports issued by the panels and those issued by the Evaluation Committees beyond homogenising the language or ensuring that the criteria are uniformly applied. Therefore, publishing both reports does not provide any additional information and would detract from the efficiency of the process. However, they are always available in the agency's archive for consultation.

Finally, in connection with ESG 3.6, ACPUA takes special care to close the feedback loops between its Evaluation Committees and the evaluation panels. In the event that the Evaluation Committee needs clarification on the panel's proposed report, the ACPUA person acting as secretary would request the intervention of the panel. On the other hand, the final report issued by the corresponding Evaluation Committee is sent to the panel informing them of the closure of the process and requesting their participation in the meta-evaluation surveys.

As for the implementation of specific protocols to deal with possible breaches of the Code of Ethics, these will be undertaken within Strategic Line 1, aimed at improving the agency's evaluation processes, thus strengthening the internal quality assurance system and ensuring the integrity of the evaluation process in all its phases.

As for the new activities, all three have the mechanisms described in the previous paragraph, which are described in the documents of each programme.

⁶⁷ <https://acpua.aragon.es/en/inquiry-reports>

⁶⁸ https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/by-report/?ordering=-created_at&limit=20&id=&agency=4&country=&status=&crossborder=&activity_type=&activity=&decision=&language=&programme_type=&other_provider_covered=&valid=

ALCAEUS programme

See section 4 on the evaluation process in the ALCAEUS framework document⁶⁹.

Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme

See section 5 on the evaluation process in the institutional accreditation renewal programme framework document⁷⁰.

PACE -SIGC programme

See section 6 on the evaluation process in the PACE-SIGC framework document⁷¹.

FINAL CRITICAL REFLECTION ON STANDARD 2.6

Systematisation in the structure of the reports, the approach to the training of evaluators and the drafting of guidelines for institutions and panels ensure that the content of the reports is well-founded, comprehensible and coherent.

The publication of the reports both on the ACPUA website and through DEQAR ensures transparency in relation to the evaluations.

The closure of all evaluation processes with the systematic sending of final reports to the evaluation panels and the implementation of specific protocols to address possible breaches of the Code of Ethics are actions that strengthen the agency's internal quality assurance system.

5.7. Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

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

Neither the 2021 ENQA Agency Review 2021 nor the final EQAR decision made any recommendations, commendations or suggestions for future development in relation to this standard.

The Agency has an Appeals Committee, created in 2016 and reformulated in 2020. This committee is the agency's technical body responsible for supervising the correct processing of the agency's evaluation, certification and accreditation procedures, reviewing on all complaints and appeals received by the agency in every process of evaluation.

It was created by agreement of the Board of Directors on 4 May 2015 in order to comply with the new ESG 2.7 (Complaints and Appeals) introduced by the Conference of Ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Erevan 2015). The committee is composed of academics, practitioners, internationals and students, at least half of whom have a legal background. The Agency has established a procedure for the management of complaints and suggestions. The procedure is published and accessible on the Agency's website.

In relation to the evaluation processes under ESGs, there have been no complaints or appeals during the entire period.

In addition, the agency has the following mechanisms in place to minimise the possibility of complaints or appeals in an evaluation process:

- All employees and panel members sign a Code of Ethics⁷² to anticipate conflicts of

⁶⁹https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/220624_alcaeus_protocol.pdf

⁷⁰https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_institutional_accreditation_renewal_en.pdf

⁷¹https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250526_prog_pace_doc_marc_en.v4.1.pdf

⁷²<https://acpua.aragon.es/en/code-ethics>

interest that may arise.

- The composition of the panel of experts proposed by the CECA is sent to the university so that it can submit a reasoned objection to any of the members of the panel if there are sufficient reasons. During the evaluation period, no panel has been challenged.
- All the agency's evaluation processes include the issuing of a proposal report that is sent to the university so that it can submit its observations before the final version of the report is completed.

As for the new activities, all three have the mechanisms described in the previous paragraph, which are described in the documents of each programme.

ALCAEUS programme

See section 4 on the evaluation process in the ALCAEUS framework document⁷³.

Institutional Accreditation Renewal

See section 5 on the evaluation process in the institutional accreditation renewal programme framework document⁷⁴.

PACE -SIGC programme

See section 6 on the evaluation process PACE-SIGC framework document⁷⁵.

FINAL CRITICAL REFLECTION ON STANDARD 2.7

In conclusion, the agency has established a robust and transparent system for handling complaints and appeals, aligned with ESG 2.7 standards.

The implementation of clear and effective mechanisms for handling complaints and appeals reinforces the trust of the assessed institutions and contributes to the strengthening of the quality assurance system in higher education.

The mechanisms put in place by the agency to deal with complaints and appeals are sufficient. The proper functioning of the system is evidenced by the fact that the complaints procedure has not been activated in this period.

6. Selected enhancement area

6.1. ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

ACPUA has selected as enhancement area for this specific review, the standard ESG 2.2: designing methodologies fit for purpose. The aim is to ensure effectiveness of its assessment procedures, while fostering deeper stakeholder engagement (especially with the student community) and specifically designing the most appropriate tools and protocols for each process.

In this section, ACPUA develops the previous evaluation results on this issue, the inclusion of the students in all the agency processes and the new initiatives related to the institutional accreditation renewal.

⁷³https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/220624_alcaeus_protocol.pdf

⁷⁴https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_institutional_accreditation_renewal_en.pdf

⁷⁵https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250526_prog_pace_doc_marc_en.v4.1.pdfceca

In previous evaluations, ACPUA was fully compliant with this standard.

In the previous evaluation, ACPUA was fully compliant in this standard. In addition, the panel commended the agency for extensively including all stakeholders in the design of its evaluation methodologies, and for regularly seeking their *feedback* through meta-evaluation processes, thus enhancing the continuous improvement of evaluation processes with the active participation of all stakeholders.

On the other hand, we should not forget that the agency works with an internal quality system which, based on the process map, keeps the documentation of all evaluation programmes (procedures, instructions and other documents) up to date. In the drafting of all evaluation protocols, special attention is paid to compliance with European standards and guidelines of the higher education system in all activities.

With regard to the panel's suggestion concerning the prioritisation of the development of a methodology for the Institutional Accreditation Renewal programme, it has already been mentioned how the design of the assessment procedure was undertaken and how all stakeholders were taken into account, specially the student body.

Throughout this report, we have detailed how we have ensured compliance with this standard in the development of the new activities implemented in the agency, taking into account the participation of stakeholders in the different stages: before the start-up (initiation), during the evaluation period and after the process (meta-evaluation). Stakeholders are adapted and integrated, depending on the objectives, in all evaluation processes that the agency undertakes, and this is reflected in all its protocols.

The agency's interest in including students in all its processes.

In the new strategic planning process, ACPUA's mission was updated to incorporate an explicit mention of the student body, thus highlighting it as a main actor in university quality. This is a visible consequence of the important work the agency has been carrying out with this group in recent years.

In addition to always having students on all the committees and degree and centre evaluation panels, the agency also demonstrates this work with the student body through the different activities carried out within the ACPUA+Students Programme:

- Post-covid strategic forum, created to analyse the effects of the pandemic on the student body in three aspects: teaching, communication and socio-emotional impact⁷⁶. The focus of this activity was to gather information on the lessons learned from the pandemic (not only what could have been done better, but also what was here to stay, such as online tutoring).
- Study on the labour market integration of the SUA⁷⁷, aimed at providing Aragonese society as a whole with verified and as accurate information as possible on the labour market integration of graduates from the Aragon University System.
- Study of guidance options⁷⁸ for students in their transition to university, designing an infographic of resources that is updated annually.
- Quality seminar on the role of the student body as an expert panel in university quality processes⁷⁹.

⁷⁶https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/focus_groups_report.pdf

⁷⁷https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/graduates_report_1617_o.pdf

⁷⁸https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/acpua_estu_orientacion_universitaria.pdf

⁷⁹https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/240430_gutierrezcreup_baev.pdf

- Self-help publication for university students entitled "Quality generation. Design your likes and be happy"⁸⁰. It is a manual of quality psychological resources for young university students and their mentors has been developed, both in Spanish and English.

⁸⁰ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/en_the_acpua_learns.pdf

Participation initiatives for the institutional accreditation renewal process.

In 2024, CECA approved the new protocol for the renewal of the institutional accreditation of the centres. At the same time, as mentioned earlier in this report, collaborative workshops were held in two university centres of the University of Zaragoza with the aim of finding out which aspects the group considered relevant for review within this process of evaluation of the centres, as well as designing with them the best tool for collecting their views.

The results of these workshops informed the publication ACPUA Aprende⁸¹ n°13 "Evaluation tool cocreation workshop", in which the conclusions on the topics that the students consider essential to take into account in the evaluation and the most appropriate methods to collect their opinion are shared.

On this basis, the agency has decided to implement a new tool that will allow to ask about all the topics proposed by the student body. The information obtained will be included as a new input for the panel of experts in the institutional accreditation renewal process.

FINAL CRITICAL REFLECTION ON SELECTED ENHANCEMENT AREA

The agency is proud of the work carried out. However, it considers necessary to reflect on and deepen the need to give consistency to the stakeholder engagement system both for the implementation of new evaluation protocols and for the improvement of existing ones.

Taking into account the SWOT results of the 24-28 strategic plan and, specifically, the comments related to strategic line 1 concerning evaluation, we would like to reflect on how to simplify the methods while ensuring the effectiveness of the evaluations.

We want to enhance the institutional evaluation by offering participation to all stakeholders and designing tools and measurements that are fit for purpose, specially with students. We would like to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the evaluation process, obtaining meaningful feedback to drive real improvements.

We have just launched the institutional accreditation renewal process and, at the same time, developed an innovative approach with the students. It is now time to test the tool and reflect on it, to ensure that we have a valid, robust and reliable protocol.

Therefore, ACPUA is interested in sharing with the members of the international panel of experts the new approach for the renewal of the institutional accreditation of future institutions. It is necessary to know their thoughts, suggestions, and recommendations regarding the agency's work on gathering information for the institutional evaluation renewal from a student-centred learning perspective.

Part III - SWOT Analysis

As part of the development of the 2024-28 strategic plan⁸², a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats and Opportunities) analysis was carried out (following a participatory process developed in 2024) in order to identify the key factors influencing the agency's performance and growth.

The analysis conducted led to a compilation of the organisation's weaknesses, threats, strengths and opportunities:

⁸¹ https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/la_acpua_aprende_13_cocreation_workshop.pdf

⁸² [Strategic plan 2024-2028](#)

Weaknesses:

Lack of flexibility in decision-making.
Economic dependence on the Government.
Instability when personnel changes are made in the Directorate.
Poor external communication and lack of visibility in society.
Inertia in implementing improvements.
High complexity in some evaluation processes.

Threats:

Regulatory modifications: Law 5/2005 on the Organisation of the University System of Aragon.
Budget cuts.
European renewal requires sound planning.
Increasing competition from internationalised agencies.
Low visibility in Aragonese society.
Lack of development in key areas such as R&D&I.
Lack of implementation of Law 17/2018 on Research and Innovation in Aragon.

Strengths:

A cohesive and experienced team.
Annual procedural review.
Positive working environment.
Experienced staff, some of whom have been with the agency for more than 15 years.
Good process management and strong internal communication.
Autonomy and good responsiveness.
Close relationship with Aragonese universities.
Satisfaction of the persons evaluated.

Opportunities:

Digitalisation and use of new technologies.
Participation in international projects.
Expand its reputation by renewing its accreditations.
Creation of new evaluation processes.
New quality seals.
Adaptation to regulatory changes that can open doors to new collaborations and work at national and international level.

Using this tool, the main variables influencing ACPUA have been analysed and used as a basis for creating the strategy that will shape the agency's projects and objectives over the next four years. Figure 22 shows the specific results of strategic line 1 concerning improvements in the agency's evaluation processes.

A focus group was held on 29 August 2024, lasting approximately one and a half hours. The session was conducted online, using the format of an executive meeting or kick-off, which facilitated the participation of all key actors without the need for travel and in a collaborative and open environment.

Two representatives from each of the following target groups, essential for the work of the agency, were invited: Board of Directors, Evaluation Committees, Universities, Network of University Quality Agencies (REACU), International, Evaluators, Students and Social Agents.

The participants urge to continue with the implementation of continuous improvement:



Figure 22: Strategic line 1

Part IV - Conclusions

ACPUA is an excellence-oriented institution that provides services to externally guarantee the quality of the University System of Aragon. Since its inclusion in the EQAR register in 2016, it has demonstrated a firm commitment to compliance with European standards and guidelines in all the activities it carries out.

Following the completion of the previous Strategic Plan, and taking some challenges into account, the agency developed its new Strategic Plan 2024-2028. This was the result of a rigorous participatory and stakeholder consultation process, ensuring its alignment with the needs and expectations of the environment.

One of the aspects of which the agency is particularly proud is that, in this process, 94% of the positive evaluations received highlighted the professionalism and attitude of ACPUA staff in the performance of the evaluation tasks.

Internationally, ACPUA has consolidated its reputation through active participation in ENQA, EQAR, ECA, INQAAHE and cross-border projects, positioning itself as a relevant voice in European quality assurance. It is important to note that the agency's leadership in promoting the commitment to the 2030 Agenda through the ALCAEUS programme signifies a forward-looking contribution to the social dimension of quality for higher education institutions.

Likewise, the efforts to advance in internationalisation, the development of its social dimension and the implementation of direct actions aimed at the student body were highlighted as significant achievements of the last five years.

Since the submission of the “follow up report” to ENQA, ACPUA has maintained and expanded its lines of work. Progress has included improved communication and visibility, the assumption of new evaluative functions and the consolidation of thematic analysis through its "ACPUA Learns" series of publications, among other relevant achievements.

In this context of strategic reflection and after the elaboration of the SAR, ACPUA hopes that this new external evaluation process will contribute to enrich the joint work initiated, with the firm intention of continuing to learn through the valuable contributions of the expert evaluators who will participate in the process.

We are still on board, will you join us?

Annexes

Annex I. Translation of standards 1.1-1.10 into the ACPUA criteria and processes

ESG PART 1	EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMES
	Study programme initial accreditation
	Study programme accreditation
	Study programme follow-up
1.1. Policy for quality assurance	Criterion 8. Internal Quality Assurance System
1.2. Design and approval of programmes	Criterion 1. Justification of the degree Criterion 2. Objectives and competencies
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	Criterion 4. Curriculum planning
1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition, certification	Criterion 3. Student admission and access
1.5 Teaching staff	Criterion 5. Academic staff
1.6 Learning resources & student support	Criterion 6. Material resources and student services
1.7 Information management	Criterion 8. Internal Quality Assurance System
1.8 Public information	Criterion 8. Internal Quality Assurance System
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Criterion 8. Internal Quality Assurance System
1.10 Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis	Criterion 8. Internal Quality Assurance System (*1)
REFERENCE DOCUMENT	(*2)

(*1) The Study Programme Initial Accreditation process is the first stage in a regulatory framework that requires official university degrees to be subject to a cyclical external evaluation process. The reference royal decree is Royal Decree 822/2021.

(*2) Study programme initial accreditation: https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/221122_prog_ver_gr_ms_v.o.pdf (Spanish).

Study programme follow-up: https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/220711_prog_seg_gr_ms_doc_marc.pdf (Spanish).

Study programme accreditation: https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/220711_prog_acre_gr_ms.pdf (Spanish).

ESG PART 1	EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONS					
	Training schools accreditation	Teaching staff evaluation system audit	Higher education institutions initial accreditation.	Partner HEI evaluation	DOCENTIA	Institutional accreditation
1.1. Policy for quality assurance	Evaluation based on degree follow-up reports	Not applicable	Criterion A. Teaching and Students	Criterion 1. Teaching and Students	Dimension 1. Planning	Assessment based on PACE-SIGC certification (*8)
1.2. Design and approval of programmes			Not applicable	Not applicable	Dimension 1. Planning	
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment			Not applicable	Not applicable	Dimension 2. Teaching development	
1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition, certification			Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	
1.5 Teaching staff			Criterion B. Human Resources	Criterion 2. Human Resources	Dimension 1. Planning Dimension 2. Teaching development Dimension 3. Outcomes	
1.6 Learning resources & student support			Criterion C. Material Resources Criterion D. Economic Resources	Criterion 3. Material Resources Criterion 4. Economic Resources	Not applicable	
1.7 Information management			Not applicable	Not applicable	Dimension 3. Outcomes	
1.8 Public information			Not applicable	Not applicable	Dimension 3. Outcomes	
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes			Not applicable	Not applicable	Dimension 3. Outcomes	
1.10 Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis			(*3)	(*5)	(*7)	
REFERENCE DOCUMENT	(*1)	(*2)	(*4)	(*6)	(*8)	

- (*1) https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/200717_prog_cert_cp_o.pdf (Spanish)
- (*2) Annual certification based on the regional regulatory framework https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/231212_resol_acpua.pdf (Spanish)
- (*3) The Higher Education Institutions Initial Accreditation is based on the review of the foreseen teaching offer, personal, material and economic resources according to the RD640/2021. Once the center has been authorised, its teaching offer must be evaluated in accordance with the RD822/2021.
- (*4) https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/250131_prog_cre_cent_ads_v8.o_en_o.pdf (English)
- (*5) The Partner HEI Evaluation is based on the review of their teaching offer, personal, material and economic resources, following the RD640/2021. The teaching offer is evaluated in accordance with the RD822/2021
- (*6) https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/200717_prog_viab_cen_ads.pdf (Spanish)
- (*7) Obtaining the certification of the programme implies the renewal of the certification every 6 years.
- (*8) https://acpua.aragon.es/sites/default/files/programa_docentia_2025_v2.o_registrado.pdf (Spanish)

Annex II. Summary of stakeholder assessments of the SAR

This self-assessment report, in its final version, has been drawn up following the opportunity for participation by most of the agency's representative Committees and Commissions, in line with the SAR preparation schedule specified in advance.

Specifically, during the months of April and May 2025:

- Meetings of the Internal Committee (staff).
 - President:
Cristina Rodríguez Coarasa, Director of the ACPUA
 - Full members:
Ana Isabel Ortega Pardos, Technical Quality Coordinator ACPUA
Belén Serrano Valenzuela, Quality and internationalisation technician of the ACPUA
Rocío Pueyo Chaparro, Head of administration and general services of the ACPUA
 - Substitute members:
Diana Monaj León, ACPUA quality and foresight technician
Mariano Aspas Aspas, ACPUA qualifications quality technician

- Sent for input to the Internal Committee (advisors).
 - Student: Laura Peiró Márquez, PhD student, University of Zaragoza, Member of the Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation Commission (CECA).
 - Academic: Javier González Benito, Vice-Rector of the University of Salamanca, President of the Subcommittee for the Evaluation of Centres (SEC).
 - Professional/interest groups: Luis Polo Rubio, Member of the ACPUA Governing Board, professional of the Spanish Red Cross Association.
 - International: Fiona Crozier, Member of the Governing Board and International Expert on the ACPUA Committee of Experts. Secretary: Rocío Pueyo Chaparro, Head of Administration Section, ACPUA

- Sent for your information and input, if appropriate:
 - Board of Directors.
 - Committee of Experts.
 - Committee of Guarantees.
 - CECA: Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation.
 - SEC: Institutions Evaluation Committee.
 - SEI: Research Evaluation Committee.
 - SEP: Faculty Evaluation Committee.
 - SET: Programmes Evaluation Committee.
 - CER: Evaluation Committees by field of knowledge: Arts and Humanities, Health Sciences, Engineering and Architecture, Sciences, Social and Legal Sciences.

Input has been received from all members of the Advisory Committee on formal and content issues.

Collaborative initiatives and congratulations have been received from the Monitoring

Committee, the Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation, as well as from the Evaluation Commission of the Social and Legal Sciences Branch of ACPUA.

An extract from one of the reviewers is attached:

"First of all, I would like to congratulate the people who have done the work, not only for its completeness, but also for the clarity with which it has been presented. The content demonstrates a solid organisational structure, with well-defined processes aligned to standards. In addition, a proactive approach to evaluation and foresight is evident, which strengthens credibility.

As I commented earlier, I particularly note the clear presentation of the achievements, strategies and actions planned for further progress in institutional quality. The documentation convincingly supports the agency's ability to meet accreditation requirements and to contribute significantly to the development of the university system.

Perhaps the only thing I would suggest (influenced by the institution I work for) is a certain social focus in the document. Perhaps it is there and I have not been able to see it. The short time I had to review it did not allow me to devote as much time to it as I would have liked, or maybe you plan to do this more social approach in another phase or documentation".

Annex III. Acronyms

AQUA: Andorra Quality Assurance University Agency.
ANVUR: Italian Quality Assurance University Agency.
AVEPRO: Holy See Quality Assurance Agency.
CECA: Commission of Evaluation, Certification and Accreditation.
CER: Evaluation Committees by field of knowledge.
DEQAR: Database of External Quality Assurance Reports.
ECA: European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education
EHEA: European Higher Education Area.
EINA: School of Engineering and Architecture, University of Zaragoza
ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
EQA: External Quality Assurance.
EQAF: European Quality Assurance Forum.
EQAR: European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.
EPSH: Higher Politechnic School of Huesca, University of Zaragoza.
ESG: European Standards and Guidelines.
GGP: Guidelines and Good Practices.
HESI: Higher Education Sustainability Initiative.
IQAS: Internal Quality Assurance System.
INQAAHE: International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education.
OEI: Organisation of Ibero-American States.
SDGs: UN Sustainability Development Goals.
SEFI: European Society for Engineering Education.
PCDVC: Associate professor with clinical link.
QA: Quality assurance.
QEB: Quality Evaluation Board.
REACU: Spanish Network of Higher Education QA Agencies.
SAR: Self-Assessment Report.
SEC: Institutions Evaluation Committee.
SEI: Research Evaluation Committee.
SEP: Faculty Evaluation Committee.
SETE: Thematic Evaluation Committee.
SET: Programmes Evaluation Committee.
SUA: University System of Aragon.
ToR: Terms of Reference.
UNESCO: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
UNITA: Universitas Montium, European university Alliance, University of Zaragoza.
UNIZAR: University of Zaragoza.
USJ: University San Jorge.