

# Protocol for conducting thematic analyses

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that aims to identify, analyse, and report on the themes, ideas, or patterns within a set of results. This approach is characterised by its flexibility, as it can be carried out using different methodologies and/or approaches to identify a "theme" in the results and analyse it in line with the initially proposed hypotheses.

According to Standard 3.4 of *The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, it is established that "agencies must regularly publish reports describing and analyzing the general conclusions of their external quality assurance activities."

The fundamental purpose of these analyses is to provide stakeholders with tools to reflect on quality assurance policies and processes, with the aim of improving these aspects at institutional, national, and international levels. A comprehensive examination of thematic analyses enables the demonstration of evolution, trends, and areas of good practices or recurring challenges.

### 1.1. External Evaluation Activities of AQUIB

AQUIB conducts various external quality assessment activities, organised in the following areas:

- **Evaluation of official university study programmes.** Within this scope, the Agency carries out the ex post accreditation of official university study programmes and follow up of official study programmes.
- **Evaluation of higher artistic study programmes.** The Agency carries out the ex post accreditation of higher artistic study programmes and its follow-up.
- **Preliminary evaluation of university faculty.** This area covers the implementation of the preliminary evaluation programme for faculty, aimed at the established hiring categories by the Autonomous Community of the Balearic Islands. This dimension is not considered within the scope of the ESG.
- **Evaluation of complementary payments.** In this area, the Agency coordinates the evaluation for complementary payments for teaching and research staff at the

University of the Balearic Islands, carrying out the process through the protocol approved by the competent Department of Universities. Similar to the previous dimension, this is not considered within the scope of the ESG.

- **Evaluation of R&D&I activities.** Within this area, AQUIB manages the evaluation of projects and research grants. The Agency carries out these actions for other institutions. This area is not considered within the scope of the ESG.

## **1.2. Type of thematic analyses**

The protocol outlined in this document encompasses two types of thematic analyses:

- **Analyses based on global compilations.** Within this approach, analyses are conducted to synthesize and examine the results from evaluations carried out by the Agency, in accordance with its annual planning. The frequency of these analyses is detailed in section 1.3 of this protocol.
- **Analyses based on a specific theme.** This type of analysis focuses on a topic of particular interest to AQUIB and/or its stakeholders. Once a relevant theme is identified, a specific analysis centred on it is conducted. The identification of topics of interest is done through the analysis of the results of the annual meta-evaluation of the corresponding action. If a request is received from any of its stakeholders, AQUIB examines the proposal and, if applicable, carries out the corresponding analysis.

In all cases, it is important that the analyses do not merely consist of data collection or summary of information, but rather integrate a comprehensive analysis that adds value to the Agency. Furthermore, collaboration with other organisations and institutions is encouraged to enrich the information and data collected. This collaboration aims to broaden the scope of the study's interest and to contrast the results with the socio-economic reality of the Balearic Islands.

It is essential to highlight that the thematic analyses conducted through this approach are complementary to those mentioned earlier and, under no circumstances, are intended to replace them. As an additional and complementary activity, the possibility of expanding information through surveys or other means can be explored, with the aim of enriching and supporting the data obtained during the evaluations carried out by the Agency.

### **1.3. Frequency of the thematic analyses**

The Agency aims to conduct an annual thematic analysis of the programmes through which AQUIB evaluates the official university study programmes, once all the planned annual evaluations in these programmes have concluded. This analysis can be carried out jointly or individually. In situations where the volume of annual evaluations is insufficient to draw valid conclusions, the option of omitting the analysis may be considered. In such cases, the management of AQUIB must draft a report justifying this decision.

Additionally, as part of its internal quality assurance system (SIGC), the Agency conducts annual meta-evaluations of all its activities, which encompass evaluation result reports and satisfaction reports. These meta-evaluations may identify topics of interest for the involved stakeholders, areas for improvement, or relevant best practices. If a topic of interest is identified, the possibility of conducting a study is evaluated depending on the Agency's activity planning and/or available resources.

If AQUIB receives a commission for a study from its stakeholders, it is examined whether it aligns with the scope of this protocol, its feasibility, and the interest of the proposed topic. The decision to carry out the study will depend on the Agency's activity planning and available resources.

## **2. DEVELOPING A THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

The process of developing thematic analyses follows the following phases: topic and/or scope selection, selection of responsible party, elaboration, dissemination, and impact analysis. Each analysis has a record containing this information, including a brief description of the study and the estimated completion date.

### **2.1. Topic selection**

In the analysis of the results from AQUIB's evaluation programmes, the scope of the study is defined after the annual meta-evaluation meeting. These analyses are systematically conducted once a year. In the event that a topic of special interest is identified — such as a relevant best practice or a guideline with consistently low ratings — a specific thematic analysis on that topic may be scheduled.

Regarding the results of other programmes within the Agency, after the annual meta-evaluation meetings, the decision to conduct a thematic analysis, whether global or specific, is made based on the needs and feasibility identified in said meeting.

### **2.2. Selection of responsible party**

For each thematic analysis, AQUIB designates a responsible person from its staff. This individual oversees the analysis, manages its dissemination, and conducts the impact assessment. Ideally, this person is in charge of the programme to which the analysis pertains. Additionally, the responsible person may appoint collaborators to join the study's work team. In such cases, it is expected that the responsible person clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of each collaborator in the process.

### **2.3. Drafting**

The team responsible for the study drafts an initial version, which is shared with the study's work team. Once the final draft is prepared, it is shared with the relevant commissions involved in the process to gather their feedback and suggestions.

Following this, the document is shared with stakeholder groups who may be interested in the study to gather their impressions. Any necessary revisions based on these comments are then incorporated into the final document.

Documents created by AQUIB's staff are endorsed by the Agency as its own. If the documents are prepared by third parties, those parties will be responsible for the document's content, with a note indicating that AQUIB does not necessarily endorse the study's conclusions.

## **2.4. Dissemination**

The person in charge of the analysis is responsible for disseminating the final document. Some of the dissemination mechanisms include:

- **Posting on AQUIB's website.** The final document will be published in the "Thematic Analyses" section of the Agency's website<sup>1</sup>. If possible, the documentation will be provided in the three languages used by AQUIB: Spanish, Catalan, and English.
- **Social media and other channels.** The link to the final document will be shared on AQUIB's social media channels and with its stakeholders. Active promotion of the document's dissemination will be carried out.
- **Seminars and forums.** AQUIB may organise seminars or participate in forums to disseminate the results of its thematic analyses.

Asimismo, se permite la difusión del análisis a través de cualquier otro medio no contemplado en este punto, con el objetivo de maximizar la visibilidad del documento.

## **2.5. Impact analysis**

The impact of a thematic analysis may vary significantly depending on its subject matter. However, AQUIB commits to evaluating it in all cases. The methodology for conducting this evaluation will be specified in the study sheet. Once the impact has been analysed, the corresponding section in this sheet will be completed.

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<sup>1</sup> Section available in: <https://www.aquib.es/en/actividades/analisis-tematicos>