

ENQA AGENCY REVIEW

# BALEARIC AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION (AQUIB)

RONNY HEINTZE, LAURA BECCARI,  
MAR CAMPINS I ERITJA, HILAL KARAOĞLAN

26 SEPTEMBER 2024

ENQA AGENCY  
REVIEW 2024

enqa.

European Association for  
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

# CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>CONTENTS</b> .....  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....   | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS</b> .....  | <b>4</b>  |
| BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW .....   | 4         |
| SCOPE OF THE REVIEW .....  | 4         |
| REVIEW PROCESS.....  | 5         |
| <b>HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY</b> .....   | <b>7</b>  |
| HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM.....   | 7         |
| QUALITY ASSURANCE.....   | 7         |
| <b>AQUIB</b> .....   | <b>9</b>  |
| AQUIB'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE.....  | 9         |
| AQUIB'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES.....   | 11        |
| AQUIB'S FUNDING .....  | 12        |
| <b>FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF AQUIB WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)</b> ..... | <b>13</b> |
| <b>ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES</b> .....  | <b>14</b> |
| ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE.....   | 14        |
| ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS.....   | 18        |
| ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE.....  | 19        |
| ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS.....   | 23        |
| ESG 3.5 RESOURCES .....  | 25        |
| ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT .....  | 27        |
| ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES .....   | 29        |
| <b>ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE</b> .....  | <b>29</b> |
| ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE.....   | 29        |
| ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE .....  | 34        |
| ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES .....   | 37        |
| ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS .....  | 40        |
| ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES .....  | 43        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| ESG 2.6 REPORTING.....                                  | 46        |
| ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS.....                     | 48        |
| <b>CONCLUSION.....</b>                                  | <b>51</b> |
| <b>SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS.....</b>                    | <b>51</b> |
| <b>OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b> | <b>51</b> |
| <b>SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT .....</b>        | <b>52</b> |
| <b>ANNEXES.....</b>                                     | <b>54</b> |
| <b>ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT .....</b>       | <b>54</b> |
| <b>ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW .....</b>  | <b>59</b> |
| <b>ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY .....</b>                          | <b>66</b> |
| <b>ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW .....</b>   | <b>67</b> |
| DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AQUIB.....                        | 67        |
| OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL .....            | 67        |

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The external review of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Agència de Qualitat Universitària de les Illes Balears, AQUIB) was conducted in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) using the methodology outlined in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews. The primary purposes of the review included assessing AQUIB's compliance with the ESG standards, evaluating its eligibility for ENQA membership, and potentially registering with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). It is the first external review against the ESG that AQUIB undergoes.

The review period spanned from the establishment of the terms of reference in December 2023 to the finalisation of the external review report in September 2024. It included a site visit by a group of independent experts based on a self-assessment conducted by AQUIB.

AQUIB is entrusted with ensuring the quality of higher education in the Balearic Islands. One only public university falls under its jurisdiction, the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB), with 18.500 students. Key activities include external evaluations of study programs (Bachelor, Master, PhD), accreditation processes, and the implementation of quality assurance frameworks for the promotion of teaching staff and for assessing research.

Representative for the size of the system in which it operates, AQUIB is a relatively small agency, with 6 staff members. Most of its constituting commissions are composed by members of outside the Balearic Islands, as to assure independence of its operations. On the other hand, currently its Governing Board in its current composition is represented solely by government and UIB representatives, which is an issue of attention that is about to be resolved by the upcoming adoption of the new statutes.

The external review identified several strengths of AQUIB, including its robust quality assurance procedures, dedicated staff training initiatives, and effective engagement with stakeholders. Areas for improvement were also highlighted, such as enhancing the independency of its governing structures in line with international standards.

AQUIB demonstrated compliance across all the standards outlined in Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG except ESG 3.3, assessed as partially compliant. Noteworthy achievements include adherence to criteria related to transparency, stakeholder involvement, and quality assurance processes. Recommendations for improvement focused on governing structures and ensuring comprehensive knowledge of assessment procedures and associated roles.

The external review panel concluded that AQUIB generally complies with the ESG standards, albeit with standard 3.3 (independency of the agency) where compliance is only partial. The agency's commitment to continuous improvement and its responsiveness to feedback were acknowledged as positive attributes contributing to its overall compliance with the ESG. In some areas, the panel could only assess AQUIB practices based on recently introduced procedures which were not yet implemented.

In conclusion, the external review of AQUIB provided a comprehensive assessment of its adherence to the ESG standards, highlighting both strengths and areas for development. The review panel wishes to underline the very honest and transparent approach of AQUIB and its stakeholders, which created a truly open atmosphere.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Agència de Qualitat Universitària de les Illes Balears, AQUIB) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted in 2023-2024 (from September 2023 – when the terms of reference were drafted – until the finalisation of the review report in September 2024).

This review was conducted for the purposes of ENQA membership application and for registration in EQAR, the latter having become a legal requisite in Spain for conducting external QA activities within the scope of the ESG. It is the first review of the agency against the ESG.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

AQUIB has been an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2008 and it is currently applying for membership.

As this is AQUIB's first external review, the panel paid particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place, being aware that full evidence of concrete results in all areas may not be available at this stage.

### SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

AQUIB's external quality assurance activities that are included in the terms of reference and are subject to this review are the following, divided in this report by the review panel into 3 main groups (A-B-C):

A1. Ex post accreditation of study programmes

A2. Follow-up of study programmes

B. Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions' teaching quality assessment systems (DOCENTIA): this activity is coordinated by AQUIB but performed by ANECA.

C1. Ex ante accreditation (verification) of art study programmes: this activity is coordinated by AQUIB but performed by AQU Catalunya.

C2. Ex post accreditation of art study programmes: this activity is currently in the preliminary phase since the protocol has been defined but not implemented.

C3. Follow-up of art study programmes: this activity is currently in the preliminary phase since the protocol has been defined but not implemented.

The review panel could ascertain before and during the on-site visit that activities of the A group are currently the core activity of AQUIB. As for B activities, they are conducted on a voluntary basis and no current requests from the University of the Balearic Islands are being assessed. So far, only a pilot assessment in 2009 was conducted. As for C activities, one single art programme has undergone the C1 phase and being assessed as any other art programme evaluated by AQU Catalunya, the communication with the programme representatives being assured by AQUIB. This single ex ante verification was not followed by the implementation of the programme. More activities are expected

in the C group in the future, as a new Spanish law<sup>1</sup> was adopted on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, making the accreditation of art Bachelor programmes compulsory (not yet the case until the on-site of AQUIB took place). The reason why B-C activities are coordinated by AQUIB but carried out by other agencies is namely because, respectively: DOCENTIA is as a voluntary process (focussing on the institutional assessment of the university's own mechanism to ensure the quality of its teaching staff) that AQUIB offers to UIB thanks to an agreement with ANECA that has dedicated staff and know-how available ; there is currently only one single Master's art programme foreseen in the university system of the Balearic Islands, too limited to justify the investment of dedicated resources by a small agency like AQUIB alone. Being ANECA and AQU Catalunya EQAR-listed, the fulfilment of the ESG for these activities is assured.

Due to the current lack of B-activities and the lack of critical mass for C-activities, the review panel could not assess the implementation of B-activities and only confirm that AQU Catalunya applies the same instruments and qualitative procedures in assessing the art programme in the Balearic Island as it does in its own jurisdiction. AQU Catalunya is listed in EQAR. As for C activities, the changing legal context might – to a certain extent – require some adaptations, as more programmes will need to be accredited (bachelor's degrees).

The panel also underlines that just a very few representatives of B-C activities other than one member of ANECA and one member of AQU Catalunya were present at the interviews during the on-site visit of AQUIB. The panel believes that this makes sense, as there are very limited activities to discuss about, for the time being.

This report will therefore focus on A activities and so will the panel's assessment on ESG compliance. References to B-C activities will be done whenever relevant.

## REVIEW PROCESS

The 2024 external review of AQUIB was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference (see annexes). The panel for the external review of AQUIB was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Ronny Heintze (Chair), Deputy director for international development at AQAS, Germany (ENQA-nominated member);
- Laura Beccari (Secretary), ex International relations officer at AAQ, Switzerland (ENQA-nominated member);
- Mar Campins Eritja, Professor in Public International Law, Department of Criminal Law and Criminology and Public International Law and International Relations, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain (EUA-nominated member);
- Hilal Karaođlan position, Member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool, enrolled in the Master's in Educational Management and Supervision at the Marmara University, Turkey (ESU-nominated member).

Alexis Fábregas Almirall, Project and Reviews Officer at ENQA, acted as the review coordinator and his guidance with regards for consistency were very helpful to the panel.

---

<sup>1</sup> New State law on artistic education: Law 1/2024, of 7 June, which regulates higher artistic education and establishes the organization and equivalences of professional artistic education. Its articles 8, 11 and 59 establishes that the Government shall develop by regulation the mechanisms for verification, monitoring and renewal or modification of their accreditation.

A consensus was always reached within the panel, having foreseen enough time for discussions and exchange of views. Whenever needed, the review coordinator was extremely keen in redirecting the panel to factual judgement criteria, based on the available instruments, and giving examples of similar contexts and how the assessment was handled by other panels. As mentioned above, the only obstacle in performing this review consisted in the state of preliminary phase for activities of the B and C groups, meaning the panel could exchange with some stakeholders on their implementation only to a very limited extent (only one art programme being under assessment so far).

### **Self-assessment report**

According to the SAR, the Self-Assessment process led to significant progress and maturity within AQUIB, evidenced by internal reflections and stakeholder engagements.

The reflections led to the development of AQUIB's first Strategic Plan. Active participation from all technical staff, facilitated by the Agency's modest size, ensured a dynamic and enriching process. Additionally, three working groups were established to assist in the elaboration of the self-assessment report, contributing to the overall collaborative effort:

**Group 1:** Comprised of quality technicians and the Technical Director, this group initiated the SAR draft, coordinating feedback from Groups 2 and 3 until the final draft was ready for the Board of Directors.

**Group 2:** Included selected experts like a Criteria Commission member with ESG and QA experience, the president of the Advisory Commission, and a former director of AQU Catalunya, who supported the drafting stages.

**Group 3:** Consisted of remaining Advisory Commission members, University, and Government representatives, providing feedback on the refined draft.

The final SAR was presented to the Board of Directors for approval in February 2024. It was then checked for completeness by the ENQA review coordinator and then shared with the review panel on 19 March 2024.

### **Site visit**

During a 2.5 days site-visit (on 29-30-31 May 2024) all relevant stakeholders were heard. On Day 1 staff representatives of the agency and their bodies and organs were interviewed, whereas external stakeholders and representatives of the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB) were grouped in interviews on Day 2.

All interviews were conducted on-site, with exception of two interviews conducted on distance, namely with the group of reviewers and with the ANECA and AQU Catalunya's representatives for the activities B-C. The programme of the visit can be found in the annexes.

The frankness of communication and the overall excellent quality of the dialogue as experienced during the site visit has facilitated the task of the review panel in fulfilling its mandate.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Balearic Islands, one of Spain's 17 Autonomous Communities and two autonomous cities, comprise four islands: Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza, and Formentera. With a population of 1,197,261 (2023), and a population density of 266 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, Palma, located in Mallorca, serves as the capital and is the 5<sup>th</sup> most densely populated region in Spain.

The University of the Balearic Islands (UIB), established in 1978, holds a unique position as the sole university in the region. The campus in Palma includes nine Faculties, a Polytechnic School, a Centre for Postgraduate Studies and a Doctoral School. Beyond its main campus there are two off-campus centres in Menorca and Ibiza. Menorca offers eight Bachelor's and one Master's programme for the academic year 2022-23, while Ibiza and Formentera provide seven Bachelor's degrees and one Master's degree during the same period. In total, the university offers 35 Bachelor's, 36 Master's programmes and 25 PhD programmes. In 2022-23, UIB's total student body reached 18,500.

Currently, the Escola d'Art i Superior de Disseny de les Illes Balears (EASDIB) stands as the sole institution providing official art study programmes which require external evaluation prior to their implementation. Specifically, only one of its programmes is under external evaluation (carried out by AQU Catalunya at the moment the site-visit of AQUIB took place), as all others are bachelor programmes that did not yet require compulsory external evaluation. Indeed, according to Spanish law at the time the site-visit took place, only master's and PhD art study programmes were required to undergo external evaluation. This will change in the near future with the development of government regulations for the implementation of the recently adopted Law 1/2024, requiring accreditation for bachelor's degrees too.

In the Balearic Islands there are 3 campuses of Spanish universities that do not fall under AQUIB's jurisdiction. So far, no private universities are planned, and legal authorizations would apply in case any other HEI had to be established in the islands.

In the broader context of QA agencies in Spain, AQUIB stands as one of the eleven agencies operating in the country. Besides ANECA, there are 10 regional agencies, each responsible for the HE system in its region, as recognised in Article 5 of Organic Law 2/2023. According to R.D. 822/2021, Article 25 specifies that ex ante accreditation and modification evaluation activities can only be performed by agencies registered in EQAR. This requirement is also applicable to AQUIB's current activities (ex post accreditation and follow-up). Agencies not included in EQAR were granted a four-year adaptation period, concluding in October 2025, to align with this.

### QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance in the higher education system of Spain has evolved significantly within the context the Bologna process. Article 27 of the Constitution recognizes university autonomy, laying the groundwork for the current quality assurance processes. The Organic Laws 6/2001 (LOU) and 4/2007 (LOMLOU) have been repealed by Organic Law 2/2023 of 22 March on the University System and establish the basic regulations for university policy on a national scale, delineating the respective powers and competencies of universities, the national government, and the governments of the Autonomous Communities. Royal Decree 43/2015 further organizes official university education, ensuring compliance with a series of Royal Decrees that constitute the compulsory national legislation applicable across all autonomous regions. The LOU assigns the tasks of evaluation, certification, and accreditation to the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) and the external assessment bodies established by the regions. With regard to programme review, the Spanish



Government mandates that degrees and higher education qualifications must follow a system of verification (ex ante accreditation), modification, monitoring, and renewal of accreditation.

In Spain, the primary actors in higher education quality assurance include ANECA, the regional quality assurance agencies, and the National Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (REACU). ANECA, established in 2002, coordinates national standards and guidelines for quality assurance. Each autonomous community, including the Balearic Islands through AQUIB, has its regional quality assurance agency responsible for implementing procedures tailored to their specific contexts, while aligning with ANECA's broader national framework. The eleven quality assurance agencies in Spain, one national (ANECA) and ten regional, collaborate within REACU, which was established in 2006 to foster collaboration and establish a common framework. REACU conducts periodic meetings, including director meetings for strategic decisions and technical meetings for specific topics. The coordination of REACU rotates annually among all member agencies, and in 2023, AQUIB took on the role of REACU coordinator.

The relationship between ANECA, the regional quality assurance agencies, and REACU is collaborative and symbiotic. While ANECA provides overarching guidelines to ensure consistency, regional agencies like AQUIB address specific regional needs within the national framework. This dual-level system promotes flexibility and context-sensitive quality assurance. Regional agencies conduct evaluations and accreditations within their jurisdictions. REACU further strengthens this system by serving as a platform for dialogue and coordination among all agencies, promoting mutual recognition of accreditations and enhancing quality assurance practices.

In line with the division of powers in the Spanish legal framework, the functions of evaluation, certification and accreditation are reserved functions of the National Agency for Quality Assurance (ANECA) and the evaluation bodies determined by each Autonomous Community's laws. In Autonomous Communities where such an evaluation body has been established and this body is registered on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), it has the competency to implement the full range of quality assurance activities which are assigned to quality assurance agencies in higher education. Which is AQUIB's ambition and vision for the near future.

Royal Decree 822/2021 introduced more flexibility related to quality assurance procedures, allowing for the recognition of review reports issued by other EQAR-listed agencies following the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. This significant progress in legislation facilitates the provision of joint degrees and their quality assurance, aligning with European standards. Although AQUIB has not yet reached the stage of cross-border quality assurance, EQAR registration opens new opportunities for future development.

Moreover, Royal Decree 420/2015 established institutional accreditation for university centres as an alternative to the model for ex post accreditation for university degree programmes. This stage, involving initial institutional accreditation, requires verification that centres have passed ex post accreditation processes for degree programmes and have certified internal quality assurance systems. AQUIB and the higher education system in the Balearic Islands are not yet ready for this stage but plan to consolidate the current system as a foundation for future institutional accreditation.

Additionally, the external quality assurance of art study programmes, which was previously obligatory only for Master's and Doctoral degrees, is now being extended to all Bachelor's programmes as of June 7th, 2024, following a recent change in the legal framework. This modification may impact AQUIB's activities, as it may decide to carry out these assessments independently, a role currently coordinated by AQUIB but executed by AQU Catalunya.

## AQUIB

Since 2001, the Spanish legislation granted the Autonomous Communities the capacity to establish their own HE assessment bodies. AQUIB was then established as a consortium on December 13, 2002, through an Agreement of the Board of Directors, which also outlined its initial statutes (Agreement of the Governing Council of 13 December 2002 approving the creation of the Consortium of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and its statutes, BOIB n° 21, 15/2/2003). The official status and competences of the Agency were conferred by Regional Law 2/2003 of 20 March, on the institutional organisation of the university system of the Balearic Islands (BOIB n° 42, de 29/3/2003). The first statutes underwent modifications on April 22, 2005, through an Agreement of the Board of Directors (Agreement of the Governing Council of 22 April 2005, approving the modification of the Statutes of the Consortium of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, BOIB n° 67, 3/5/2005).

Currently, AQUIB has undergone another modification of its statutes, with only a final step remaining, affecting the composition of the Governing Board and the appointment of the Director, to be concluded with the adoption of the new statutes. **All references included in this report refer to the currently implemented rules and practices**, be them reflected in the 2005 or in the new statutes.

One of AQUIB's main legal mandates, for which the agency is strongly recognized in the university system of the Balearic Islands, is the evaluation and promotion of the teaching staff and more generally the promotion of research. These activities do not fall under the scope of the ESG and are therefore not part of the present assessment.

AQUIB is well connected nationally and internationally. It is an active member of REACU (Spanish Network of University Quality Agencies). At the international level, besides being an affiliate of ENQA, AQUIB is a member of INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education.) and EARMA (European Association of Research Managers and Administrators).

### AQUIB'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

AQUIB is a small agency, with currently 6 staff members (a technical director, an administrative manager and 4 quality technicians). Its organisational structure comprises governing bodies, advisory bodies, technical bodies and operational staff.

#### **Governing bodies** (drawn from the SAR):

President: The president of AQUIB is appointed by the regional minister of the Balearic Islands and is invariably the General Director of the department with powers in university. The president chairs the Board of Directors, representing the agency, and signs agreements with other institutions.

Board of Directors: currently composed of representatives of UIB, of the government and of academics, it convenes at least twice a year, focusing on strategic responsibilities such as approving the annual activity plan, annual activity report, strategic plan, budget, agreements with other entities, the organisational structure of the agency, or the ratification of the Code of Ethics and Quality Policy. Its composition is under revision, in force as the new statutes will be approved.

Director. Currently, this position is not covered. With the implementation of the new statutes, the appointment of the Director will follow an open, competitive and freely contested process, whereas under the current statutes it would have been a political appointment, which never took place.

## **Advisory bodies**

Advisory Commission: It advises AQUIB to enhance its processes and actions plans, as well as to define its strategic guidelines ensuring the quality of the agency's activities. The Commission is required to convene at least once a year. Members, appointed by AQUIB's President based on the Director's proposal, must have experience at the HE level. The Commission comprises between four and eight experts in the scientific, academic or professional field, with all but one member external to the Balearic Islands HE system. Notably, at least one expert conducts work outside Spain. Additionally, the Commission is required to include at least one student. The composition, functions and rules of functioning are detailed in the Advisory Commission Internal Operating Rules.

## **Technical bodies** (relevant for the AQUIB activities under review)

Technical Director: It is responsible for coordinating and representing the different technical bodies and technical staff from AQUIB, identifying potential threats and opportunities for the Agency, among other tasks. Till the Director's position remains unoccupied, the Technical Director assumes all its functions. The appointment of the Technical Director is based on an open, competitive and freely contested process.

Guarantees Commission: It is tasked with monitoring the proper application of AQUIB's procedures. This involves handling complaints and appeals against AQUIB's decisions, ensuring compliance with the Agency's Code of Ethics, and reporting any non-compliance. It comprises two or more experts in the scientific, academic or professional field (one of whom may be an international expert) and at least one student. All members are external to the Balearic Islands HE system, refraining from participating in other AQUIB activities, and half of them must have a juridical background. They are appointed by the Director based on the Advisory Commission's proposal. Its specific composition, functions and rules of functioning are detailed in the Internal Operating Rules of the Guarantees Commission. The current composition of the Commission includes four members: one Professor of Public Law, one HE QA expert with a PhD in Law, an international expert in the legal department of a renowned company, and a PhD student in Juridical and Political Sciences.

Criteria Commission: It analyses, revises and approves criteria and guidelines for AQUIB programmes, and makes any revisions deemed necessary. Assessment processes conducted by the Agency's different commissions rely on these documents. The Criteria Commission, comprising only individuals from outside the Balearic Islands HE System, includes five or more experts of renowned prestige in the scientific, academic, or professional field, covering at least the five areas of knowledge, and at least one student. Members do not participate in AQUIB's programme evaluation as peer reviewers and are appointed by the Director, after hearing the Advisory Commission. The composition, functions and rules of functioning are detailed in the Internal Operating Rules of the Criteria Commission. The current Criteria Commission composition is of five academic experts, one student and one expert in EQA and the ESG.

Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation (CET): this Commission is responsible of the external evaluation of study programmes. It is divided in two sub-commissions (one for the field of Arts and Humanities, Social and Legal Sciences and a second one for the field of Sciences, Health Sciences and Engineering and Architecture), both composed only by experts from outside the Balearic Islands HE system. Members are appointed by the Director of AQUIB, after hearing the Advisory Commission. These members are academics with proven expertise both in the academic field and in HE management; one or more QA expert, one student and one representative of the professional world. The composition, functions and rules of functioning are detailed in the Internal Operating Rules of the CET and Panels of Experts.

## AQUIB'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

AQUIB follows a structured annual cycle, starting with the development of an Activity Plan and finalising with an Annual Activity Report.

AQUIB's main external QA activity under the scope of the ESG concerns the accreditation of UIB's programmes, grouped as A-activities in this report:

→ A1. Ex post accreditation of study programmes – According to the SAR, this activity involves a comprehensive evaluation of the study programme (Bachelor, Master or PhD) before the completion of the first 6/8-year cycle or 6/8 years after the previous ex post accreditation. A successful report ensures the study programme's continuity, while a negative one may lead to programme extinction. This activity includes a site visit by a panel of experts to ensure that the programme's quality and outcomes align with the initially planned objectives. It also evaluates how the institution implements insights from the last follow-up report to enhance the overall programme quality. Reports from this process reflect any deficiencies detected and include suggestions for improvement.

→ A2. Follow-up of study programmes – AQUIB conducts follow-up evaluations three years after the implementation of a successful ex ante accreditation to ensure the correct implementation of the study programme according to the initial project. According to the SAR, two follow-up evaluations were conducted within the initial six years (at 2 and 4 years), a practice consistently endorsed by the university in year-end meta evaluation. However, recent regulatory changes under R.D. 822/2021 have standardised the interval to three years. In case of a negative report, AQUIB retains the flexibility to perform an additional evaluation the following year. Following the first successful ex post accreditation, the CET schedules the subsequent follow-up.

These assessments are preceded by ex ante accreditation and potential modifications of study programmes, which are currently overseen by ANECA within the Balearic Islands. However, if AQUIB is accepted as a member of ENQA and obtains registration in EQAR, AQUIB would assume a more comprehensive role, gaining the capability to conduct ex ante accreditations and modifications of study programmes in the Balearic Islands, assuming responsibility throughout the entire external evaluation cycle. Therefore, AQUIB has not yet begun drafting guidelines for these activities. This process would start following the AQUIB's inclusion in ENQA and EQAR.

Concerning the external QA of art study programmes (grouped as C activities in this report), AQUIB is authorised to perform this activity within the framework of the Spanish jurisdiction, under an agreement with AQU Catalunya. In other words, AQUIB can coordinate procedures conducted by AQU Catalunya.

→ C1. Ex ante accreditation of art study programmes – In accordance with the Spanish legislation, institutions must seek ex ante accreditation before implementation. Unlike other university study programmes, art study programs do not require quality agencies to be members of ENQA and registered in EQAR to conduct this activity, as per R.D. 1614/2009 and R.D. 21/2015. Consequently, AQUIB carries out this process through an agreement with AQU Catalunya. Under this agreement, AQUIB coordinates the process between AQU and the institutions, but the evaluation responsibility lies with AQU. All procedures follow AQU Catalunya's framework.

Collaboratively, AQUIB and AQU Catalunya have conducted ex ante twice for the same master's programme, once in 2016 and again in 2022. However, the programme has not been implemented yet. AQUIB would handle its follow-up (expected three years after implementation) and ex post accreditation (six years from implementation) when the time comes. Thus, these activities are presented at a preliminary phase level, awaiting results.

As explained, due to a lack of critical mass AQUIB does not carry out these activities on its own. The situation is about to change, as the legal framework has just been modified, with accreditation becoming compulsory for all Bachelors' programmes (previously only obligatory for Master's and Doctoral degrees). The new Spanish law was adopted on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

The same goes for DOCENTIA (B activity in this report), the Support Programme for the Evaluation of the Teaching Activities of University Teaching Staff, developed by ANECA and a couple of other regional agencies as a voluntary process aiming to assist universities in developing quality management mechanisms to assess and enhance the quality of their teaching staff. Based on an agreement with ANECA renewed in 2022, AQUIB can coordinate these assessments for the Balearic Islands, which are then conducted by ANECA. AQUIB is awaiting progress from UIB in advancing their mechanisms and submitting application to start the process. While the Agency is prepared, it has only conducted one evaluation for a pilot study in 2009.

There are no coordinated international activities of the agency so far, within EQA activities falling under the scope of the ESG, besides participation to ENQA seminars and conferences.

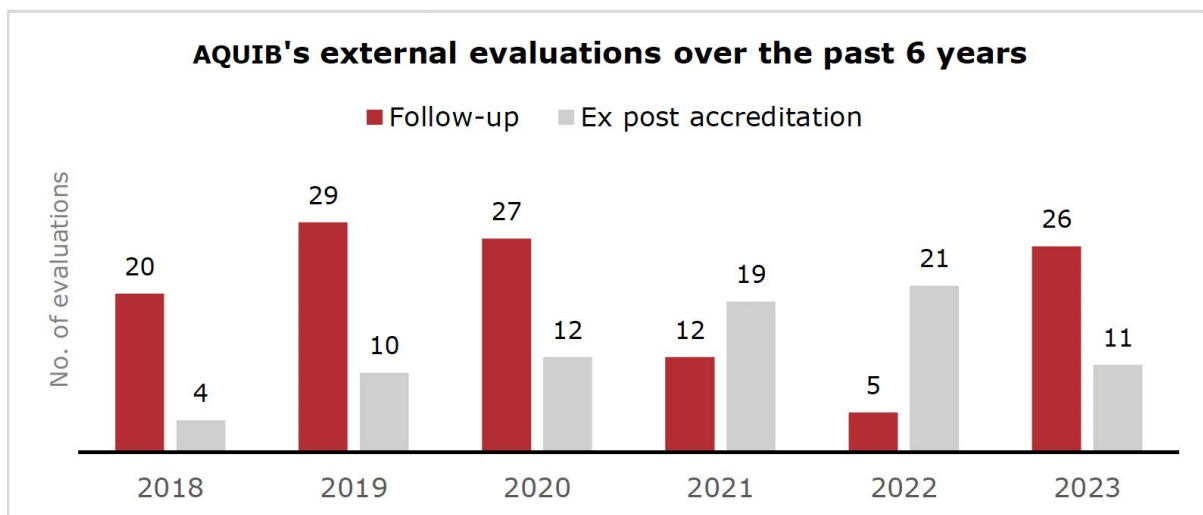
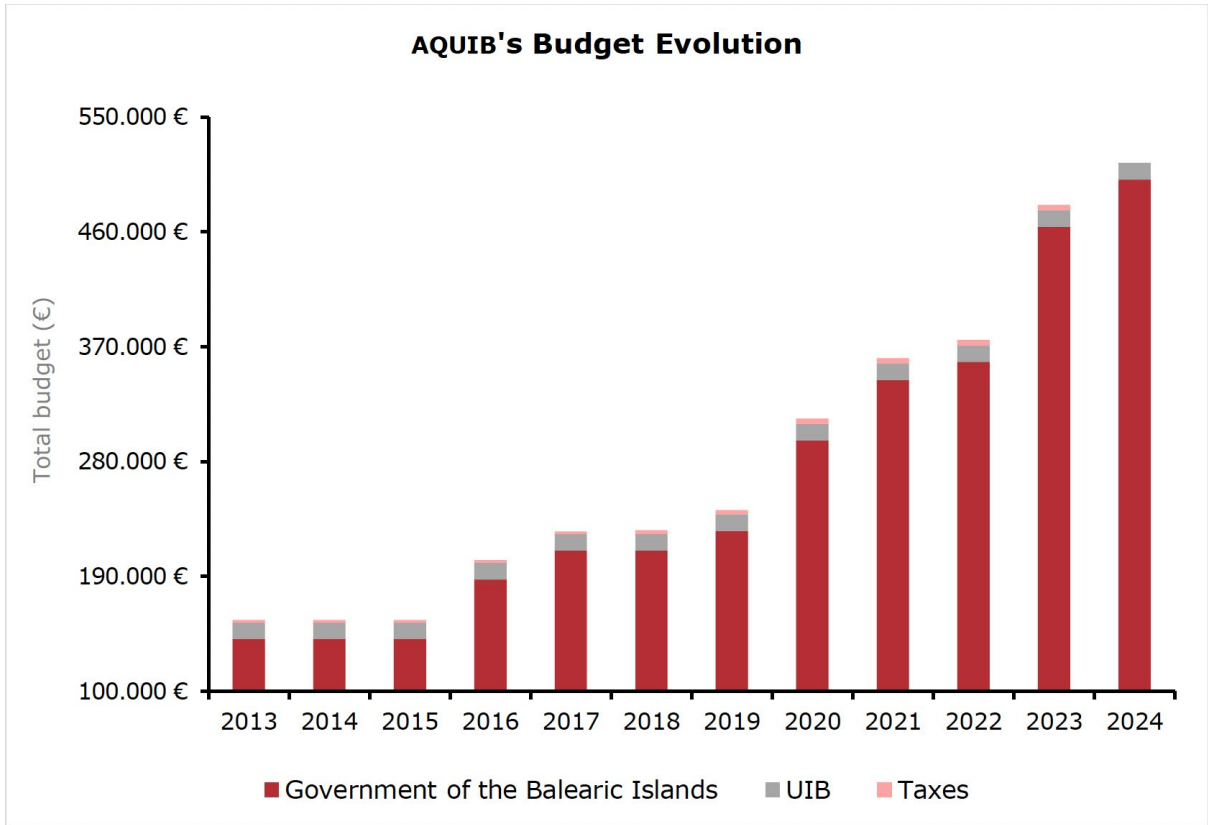


Figure 1. AQUIB's external evaluations of study programmes over the past 6 years

## AQUIB'S FUNDING

AQUIB's budget is an independent item within the total budget of the Government of the Balearic Islands (CAIB), annually approved by the Parliament of the Balearic Islands. The funds primarily come from the CAIB, although the UIB contributes a small amount, due to legal requirements as a member of the Consortium, and to cover part of the external evaluations conducted by AQUIB.

In 2023, AQUIB's had a total budget of €481,150, with a constant rise through years.



**Figure 2.** AQUIB's budget evolution since 2013

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF AQUIB WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

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

#### Evidence

AQUIB's regulatory framework encompasses a range of regulations that define the agency's activities, which extend beyond the scope of the ESG. Key regulatory documents in this framework include:

- The Agreement of the Governing Council of 13 December 2002, which approved the creation of the Consortium of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and its statutes (published in BOIB n° 21, on 15 February 2003). This document contains the statutes of the Consortium of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- Law 2/2003, dated 20 March, concerning the institutional organization of the university system of the Balearic Islands (published in BOIB n° 42, on 29 March 2003).
- The Agreement of the Governing Council of 22 April 2005, which approved the modification of the Statutes of the Consortium of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (published in BOIB n° 67, on 3 May 2005).
- The draft 2024 Statutes of the Consortium of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which are not yet in force.

The agency demonstrates compliance with ESG 3.1 through a structured approach involving regular external quality assurance activities and clear goals and objectives as part of its published mission statement: "AQUIB takes a proactive role in enhancing the quality of the Higher Education and Research Environment in the Balearic Islands. This is achieved through the agency's evaluation, certification, and accreditation processes in the areas of teaching, research, management, and knowledge transfer. Our commitment is to align these processes with rigorous international quality standards, ensuring that our region's educational and research endeavours meet and exceed global benchmarks for excellence."<sup>2</sup>. As evidenced in the SAR, this mission is reinforced by a vision, which is "to become a leading referent in quality assurance for Higher Education and Research, contributing to the ongoing enhancement of society". Included in AQUIB's vision is to obtain ENQA membership and EQAR registration to foster collaborations with national and international institutions.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aquib.es/en/actividades/quienes-somos>.

The agency's mission and vision, available on its website, guide its commitment to quality assurance in higher education and research within the Balearic Islands. To achieve this, AQUIB bases on nine core values, which then translate into a strategic plan and actions:

1. *Autonomy: respecting the autonomy of the institutions we collaborate with.*
2. *Transparency: conducting our activities with clarity and providing transparent information about our management.*
3. *Independence: working independently to fulfil our mission, vision, and objectives.*
4. *Commitment to quality, innovation, and excellence: these principles underpin our culture, driving continuous improvement in all that we do.*
5. *Integrity: building trust through responsible actions by our organization and its members.*
6. *Stakeholder orientation: our management focuses on meeting the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.*
7. *Rigour: carrying out our activities with precision and technical excellence.*
8. *Efficient management: achieving our goals through ethical, economical, and equitable use of resources.*
9. *Social responsibility: acknowledging our commitments to sustainable development and our impact on society.*<sup>3</sup>

The Board of Directors approved AQUIB's first Strategic Plan on December 19, 2022. Covering the period from January 2023 to December 2025, this initiative geared towards increasing AQUIB's interaction and visibility within society through six strategic lines (SL):

SL1. Internationalisation: AQUIB's commitment to international standards is reflected in its ambition to align with the ESG. The strategic goal includes obtaining membership in ENQA and registering with EQAR. This line also envisions expanding AQUIB's international activities, setting a foundation for future European engagement, thus ensuring that AQUIB remains competitive and recognized on an international level.

SL2. Quality management systems: this line focuses on promoting continuous improvement within AQUIB's activities. Actions under this line include revising criteria, optimizing guidelines, developing new documents for expert evaluations, and conducting stakeholder training sessions. Additionally, it integrates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) into AQUIB's activities, highlighting a commitment to broader societal impact and transparency.

SL3. Increasing autonomy and independence: ensuring complete independence in its activities and decisions is crucial for AQUIB. This strategic line involves modifying the agency's statutes (ongoing) and creating new commissions (achieved).

SL4. Communication tools: recognizing the need to improve visibility and stakeholder engagement, AQUIB launched a new website in January 2023, aiming to optimize the management of public information and enhance transparency. This line also includes the creation and management of social media platforms to increase the agency's online presence (ongoing). Additionally, AQUIB plans to participate more actively in forums, meetings, and conferences to better connect with stakeholders and enhance its public image.

SL5. Quality promotion in HE: AQUIB aims to proactively engage stakeholders and ensure their involvement in all activities. This includes incorporating international experts into the agency's initiatives (ongoing) and addressing a more systematic approach to thematic analysis (ongoing).

SL6. Adequacy and optimisation of resources: the final strategic line focuses on optimizing the technological platforms used by AQUIB staff and external experts (achieved). It also involves aligning

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aquib.es/en/actividades/quienes-somos>.



AQUIB's organizational structure and staff profile with current and future needs, ensuring that the agency is equipped to meet the evolving demands of higher education quality assurance (ongoing).

The strategic plan, as well as the report on the fulfilment of 2023 strategic actions, are publicly accessible on the agency's website.

Based on SL5, annual activity plans detail the agency's scheduled external reviews in collaboration with the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB). Between 2018 and 2023, AQUIB implemented several ESG-relevant activities, focusing on follow-up and ex post accreditation, as illustrated in the SAR and in the introductory chapter of the present report. Other activities have not been implemented yet or are conducted on a voluntary basis, with no procedures in the last five years, or they touch no more than one single programme (such as master's degrees in art study programs) and are ongoing (please refer to the introductory chapter, under "Scope of the Review").

The creation of annual work plans, developed in collaboration with stakeholders particularly regarding scheduling (SL2), is among the evidence collected in the SAR and confirmed during interviews with stakeholders on site.

As described in the SAR and mentioned in the interviews, stakeholder involvement is a key component of AQUIB's governance and work. The design of the agency's bodies, based on the 2005 statutes, allows flexibility to broaden stakeholder representation.

The composition of these organs is as follows:

- The Advisory Commission comprises two academics from outside the Balearic Islands, one from the Balearic Islands, one student, one labour market representative, and one international expert.
- The Criteria Commission consists of five academics, one student, and one expert in external quality assurance (EQA).
- The current composition of the CET includes ten members, with each group consisting of one labour market representative, one student, and eight academics.
- The current Board of Directors has six members, including four government representatives and two academics. The presence of unions, and students on the Board of Directors is anticipated in the 2024 Statutes, which are not yet in force.

Based on SL3, the draft 2024 Statutes aim to broaden the composition of the Board of Directors and regulate the appointment procedure of a director based on public competition. The SAR details a plan to broaden stakeholder representation on the Board of Directors, which has been legally reviewed and is ready for implementation pending the external review's results. This was confirmed during the on-site visit. More information about this topic is given under ESG 3.3.

## **Analysis**

Based on the evidence gathered, the panel believes that AQUIB consistently implements quality assurance activities in accordance with Part 2 of the ESG. These activities align with principles derived from its vision and mission. The general goals and principles are regulated at the national and regional levels, and AQUIB adheres to these regulations. This adherence results in the creation of annual work plans, which are developed in collaboration with stakeholders, particularly regarding scheduling. The review panel finds this to be a very clear and effective planning and implementation process.

The vision and mission are clearly public. Based not only on the analysed documents, but also the interviews the review panel can confirm that the principles of integrity and of stakeholder orientation are integral part of the organizational culture of AQUIB. AQUIB's mission and values are effectively translated into a comprehensive strategic plan that encompasses six key strategic lines (SL), each

designed to enhance the agency's operations and impact within the higher education quality assurance landscape.

Besides stakeholder representation in the expert groups, the review panel agrees with the agency that stakeholder involvement was a challenge in the past. Indeed, according to the 2005 statutes, there was a lack of representativeness of social actors (labour market and students) in the composition of the AQUIB's bodies, with a strong weighting in favour of government representatives and academics. The panel learned from the interviews that in the recent past AQUIB started using the freedom given by the statutes to address this issue and compensate for this lack of stakeholder involvement by implementing the statutes in a way resulting in broader stakeholder representation, wherever possible (SL3). The panel positively recognizes that in the key decision-making bodies stakeholders are present, namely students, professionals, and QA experts. With the newly implemented bodies, stakeholder representation and their practical footprint has substantially increased (SL5). The panel carefully analysed the extent to which this is well covered by the 2005 statutes and found evidence to praise the work of the agency to strengthen stakeholder involvement. The role of students was clearly increased. The panel could see empowered students with a clear idea about their role and contribution for the work of the agency.

Regarding the involvement of representatives from professional organizations this clear footprint could not yet be strongly felt. Being a small system, social representatives or stakeholders from the labour market could be involved more intensively in the elaboration of the strategy through regular meetings and interactions with AQUIB. However, formal provisions for the incorporation of their input into the AQUIB processes could be better structured. There is little evidence of systematic interaction or dialogue with representatives from professional organizations. At the meeting with stakeholders, one participant commented that, although the work of AQUIB is highly valued, the contact with social representatives could be improved. At the same meeting, it was pointed out that there had not traditionally been much interaction with the professional associations, but that this situation has improved a lot in recent years, and that communication between them is now very fluid. Still, they recognize there is room for further development in the future. In any case, interactions are limited to the implementation of assessment activities, but do not occur in relation to the preparation and design of guidelines, programmes, or methodologies.

Within an overall very successful upscaling of stakeholder involvement in the work of the agency in the past years, involving stakeholders in the governance is not yet fully achieved. A plan to broaden stakeholder representation on the Board of Directors has already been consensually negotiated and will result in new statutes (SL3). The composition of the Board of Directors will be further discussed under ESG 3.3. The panel is very clear in its assessment that as soon as the new statutes come into force this issue will be solved. The consensus on the representation is already achieved. Consequently, the panel encourages to set into force the new statutes without delay. The panel extensively discussed and analysed the impact of this remaining obstacle on the overall involvement of stakeholders in the work and governance of AQUIB and concluded that there is a substantial footprint of stakeholders in the agency already at this time.

One of the challenges mentioned in the strategy is to achieve greater internationalisation of the agency, yet the agency's current international exposure still remains limited. During the meetings it was referred to committee members "who have some international experience", rather than to "international" members who come from other countries or other university/QA cultures. The review panel confirms that the current level of internationalisation responds to the current needs of AQUIB. If SL1 is achieved, there will be more room for further developing SL5, incorporating international experts in panels and increasing the potential of AQUIB's internationalisation.

### **Panel commendations**

C1. AQUIB is commended for its clear and efficient process of designing annual work plans in collaboration with stakeholders, particularly in terms of scheduling.

C2. AQUIB is commended for its intense efforts over the past two years to strengthen stakeholder involvement in the Advisory Board, Criteria Commission, Guarantee Commission, and CET in alignment with the spirit of the ESG.

### **Panel recommendation**

R1. AQUIB is recommended to improve stakeholder involvement in the Board of Directors as foreseen in the new draft statutes.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

S1. The review panel suggests AQUIB to intensify its efforts to increase the impact of involvement of the professional sector.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard:

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

### **Evidence**

AQUIB is a consortium created by the Balearic government and the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB). These entities are legal entities of a corporate nature, formed through the association of different entities, and operate within the instrumental public sector of the autonomous administration.

AQUIB is regulated under Spanish Law 40/2015, which governs the Legal Regime of the Public Sector, and Balearic Law 7/2010, concerning the Instrumental Public Sector. These laws define them as administrative instruments with their own public legal personality.

Organically, AQUIB is attached to the regional Ministry of Education and Universities of the Balearic government, which formally oversees and controls its operation. This arrangement is typical of most Spanish Autonomous Communities.

### **Analysis**

The review panel confirms that AQUIB has a well-established legal foundation and is formally recognized as a quality assurance agency by competent public authorities. AQUIB operates as a consortium created by the Balearic government and the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB), both of which are legal entities of a corporate nature functioning within the instrumental public sector of the autonomous administration. This structure is regulated by Spanish Law 40/2015, concerning the Legal Regime of the Public Sector, and Balearic Law 7/2010, pertaining to the Instrumental Public Sector, granting AQUIB its own public legal personality. Additionally, AQUIB is organically attached to the regional Ministry of Education and Universities of the Balearic government, which oversees its operations. This organizational setup is consistent with the standard practice in most Spanish

Autonomous Communities, further solidifying AQUIB's legitimacy and formal recognition in the realm of quality assurance.

**Panel conclusion: compliant**

### ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

##### *Organisational independence*

The creation of AQUIB was approved by the Agreement of the Governing Council on 13 December 2002, which established the Consortium of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and its statutes (published in BOIB n° 21, on 15 February 2003). Law 2/2003, enacted on 20 March, pertains to the institutional organization of the university system of the Balearic Islands (published in BOIB n° 42, on 29 March 2003). The Agreement of the Governing Council on 22 April 2005 approved the modification of the Statutes of the Consortium of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (published in BOIB n° 67, on 3 May 2005). These statutes regulate AQUIB's framework, leaving room for a fully independent implementation. Indeed, certain powers that should not reside within the Board of Directors are already transferred to other bodies (Advisory Commission, Guarantees Commission, Criteria Commission).

The new 2024 Statutes of the Consortium of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education have been drafted but are not yet in force. The modification of the 2005 statutes would expand AQUIB's Board of Directors composition including representatives from the national and international HE community, the broader society and a student, in addition to representatives from UIB, the Social Council and the Regional Government. The revised composition is detailed in the new statutes. This is essential for completing full organisational independence, one of AQUIB's core values and a strategic line of action of its Strategy 2023-2025.

Consequently, there is currently no student nor external stakeholder representation on the Board of Directors such as trade unions or employers' organizations. Article 20.3 of Law 7/2010 establishes that the Board of Directors should consist of a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 13 members, with the majority appointed directly or indirectly by bodies of the Autonomous Community Administration or the Autonomous Communities' public sector. The AQUIB 2024 Statute specifically adapts the composition of its governing body to meet the legal requirements. Article 16 of the 2024 Statute sets the board's composition at 13 members, whereas the 2005 Statutes, issued before Law 7/2010, had foreseen only 6 members. Thus, the 2024 Statute adjusts the governing body to comply with the law, increasing the number of members from 6 to 13.

According to the 2005 Statutes, two members of the Board of Directors are appointed by the minister responsible for universities, two are appointed by the president of the Social Council of the UIB, and two are academics appointed by the rector of UIB. This composition results in significant government and UIB representation in the Board. The president of the Board of Directors is typically the Director General for Universities of the Balearic government, who has a casting vote in decision-making, thereby allowing the government to impose its position in case of a tie.

Currently, members of the technical committees are supposed to be appointed by AQUIB's Director, who is in principle appointed by the Balearic minister responsible for university affairs. However, the function of Director of AQUIB has not been covered since November 2009. Since then, the position of Director has remained vacant, and the Technical Director has assumed those responsibilities from December 2009 to the present. Therefore, the Technical Director, chosen through a public competition, is running the agency. According to the arrangement foreseen by the 2005 statutes, the Balearic government directly and indirectly appoints most of the members of the executive bodies, through AQUIB's Director. This theoretical scenario was circumvented by avoiding the appointment of a new Director, as discussed during the interviews on site.

The assessment of AQUIB's independence is therefore linked to the applicable regulation and the current state of implementation. The SAR and meetings with various stakeholders (including the President, Technical Director, Board of Directors, and regional Government representatives) confirm that the 2005 Statutes are the ones currently in force, as the 2024 Statutes have not yet been formally adopted. The legislative process for their formal adoption had not been concluded yet at the moment the site-visit of AQUIB by the review panel took place. During the visit, the government confirmed willingness to approve the amendment. The SAR recognizes this situation, noting that the final phase requires the signature of CAIB's Governing Council and AQUIB's Board of Directors, a step that is still pending.

Once the 2024 Statutes come into force, the Board of Directors will include a broader representation, including students, trade union representatives, and employers' organizations. The appointment process for the Director will also change to an open and competitive process based on merit and suitability. The Advisory Commission will continue to play a significant role as an advisory body without decision-making capacity. The new Board of Directors' composition under the new draft statutes would ensure a more balanced representation.

Despite the balanced representation of the Board of Directors offered by the new statutes, the review panel learned during the on-site visit that there is a legal requirement that links the size of an organisation to the size of its board. Indeed, the Law 7/2010, article 20.3 implies that full stakeholder representation may not be immediately justified until the agency grows. If part of the seats on the Board of Directors remains unfilled, as mentioned during the on-site visit as a possible outcome, this could become an issue for compliance with ESG 3.3.

#### *Operational independence*

AQUIB's structures ensure the necessary checks and balances and impartiality in evaluations, as well as the capacity of the agency to define its procedures and methods. This independence was confirmed during interviews with UIB representatives and underscored by the UIB rector, who emphasized the importance of AQUIB's independence for the credibility and quality of UIB's provisions. Given the small size of the system and the proximity of AQUIB representatives to the UIB, maintaining full independence, neutrality, and integrity in operations is essential for the acceptance of AQUIB's evaluations by UIB.

As outlined in the SAR, operational independence within the agency encompasses two dimensions: the independence of individuals involved in AQUIB's evaluation activities, both as members of these bodies and as external experts participating in on-site visit panels and the autonomy of AQUIB's bodies.

To ensure a comprehensive and unbiased perspective, all members of AQUIB's technical bodies and panel participants are sourced from outside the Balearic Islands HE system. The Advisory Commission is the only exception, allowing one member from within the system, in addition to the Board of Directors. Each commission operates under its own set of regulations, outlining its composition,

criteria for member selection, and designated functions. In parallel, the criteria for the selection of expert panels are regulated in the Internal functioning of panels and CET, which is approved by the Criteria Commission. Members of the CET and panels have no relation with the Balearic Islands HE system and have no representation in the Board of Directors. The Criteria Commission, responsible for approving guidelines and criteria for external evaluation activities, does not participate in the evaluation processes nor issues evaluation reports.

Every individual involved in AQUIB's activities is bound by the Agency's Code of Ethics, which emphasizes the independence of the individuals engaged, and necessitates the signing of a confidentiality agreement.

AQUIB is attached to the Department of Universities of the Balearic government, which supervises its operations. The agency is almost entirely dependent on public funding, primarily from the regional government budget. Despite this dependence, Spanish agencies typically maintain statutory independence in budget allocation to fulfil their activities.

#### *Independence of formal outcomes*

The Agency evaluates only one university in the Balearic Islands, which is an inherent aspect that needs special attention in ensuring integrity of outcomes; thus, the structure of AQUIB and its bodies has been carefully designed as to guarantee the full independence of formal outcomes, meaning that members of the different evaluation commissions cannot be influenced by third parties and the decision-making system foresees no local members involved and an accurate balance in different layers of checks and controls, added to the integrity of staff and their distance to the decision-making process, as described under ESG 2.5 (Criteria for outcomes).

#### **Analysis**

The decision to establish AQUIB was made jointly by the Balearic government and the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB) to benefit the entire university system, which currently comprises only one public university, with no expectations of additional private universities being established in the near future. This initiative aimed to create fit-for-purpose solutions tailored to the local system and reduce dependence on the national agency, ANECA, a trend seen also in different Spanish Autonomous Communities. This decision aligned with the Spanish legislation on universities at the time, which introduced a principle of decentralization.

AQUIB's activities focus on managing programme quality assessment processes, monitoring, and assessing teaching staff and research activities. Based on the evidence, the review panel confirms that AQUIB operates independently, without influence from the government or UIB in its assessments and accreditation processes.

The current 2005 statutes limit AQUIB's independence in its governing structure. However, the new statutes of 2024, which are already drafted and agreed upon, will substantially increase AQUIB's independence. AQUIB's independence from the government is challenged under the current rules regarding the composition of its bodies. The Board of Directors remains predominantly governmental, and neither students nor external stakeholders are involved. The SAR acknowledges the difficulty of reconciling the current Board of Directors' composition with the criteria for standard 3.3, stating, "The previous composition of the Board of Directors posed a significant challenge in complying with ESG 3.3. The representation of stakeholders within the Agency was incomplete, and certain responsibilities not ideally suited for this body were assigned."

Although it was emphasized during meetings that the Board of Directors' powers are few and that it does not participate in establishing technical criteria, its functions remain important according to the statutes (both 2005 and 2024). These functions include approving strategic planning, the budget, the

working program, hiring staff, and creating commissions. The current absence of social stakeholders and students on the Board of Directors represents a lack of checks and balances, potentially affecting decision-making, budgetary decisions, transparency, and accountability. AQUIB has analysed this issue and has already achieved substantive progress in working on a solution through the amendment of the current statutes, which have received acceptance from all legal bodies and stakeholders. In the meantime, to "depoliticize" the management from the Board of Directors, the role of the Advisory Commission has been increased, and the technical committees (Criteria, Guarantee, CET) have been given important functions and are in charge of AQUIB's operational activity. The non-appointment of a director also contributes to this "depoliticization" of the agency. An appointment according to the 2005 statutes would have involved a fixed-term mandate subject to political nomination and typical turnover. The Technical Director at the head of AQUIB operates the agency with complete freedom and is accountable only to the Board of Directors, without direct interaction with the government.

The review panel confirms that the number and definition of the members participating in the Board of Directors according to the new draft statutes of 2024 will resolve the current lack of structural independence. However, while the new statutes will solve the key issue of stakeholder representation on the Board of Directors, a subsequent challenge remains: ensuring the new Board composition effectively brings the required balance to assure independence, as the Board size seems conditioned to the size of the agency (Law 7/2010, article 20.3). The choice of members will be crucial for the compliance with ESG 3.3. Therefore, AQUIB must work on the composition of the new Board of Directors according to the spirit of the 2024 statutes. In the meantime, it is necessary to incorporate stakeholder and student representation and foresee potential issues if the 2024 statute provisions are not rapidly implemented. In fact, if part of the seats on the Board of Directors remains unfilled, this could become an issue. Additionally, there is the possibility that two "governmental" members of the Board of Directors may be represented by the same person. In principle, each member would have an individual right to vote, but Law 40/2015 on the Legal Regime of the Public Sector prevents the same person from splitting their vote. A recent reorganization of the Balearic government led to the merger of the departments of Education and Research, resulting in the two seats falling to a single representative. This needs to be monitored, although it is not directly covered by the scope of this review.

AQUIB's independence from the only public university in the Balearic system is guaranteed by the technical criteria applied by various committees in the assessment processes and the external experts involved. The UIB's financial participation in AQUIB's funding is very limited, almost symbolic. Meetings with AQUIB and UIB representatives confirmed mechanisms in place that allow full independence of AQUIB without interference from UIB. The UIB rector reaffirmed that the close and fluid relationship between UIB and AQUIB is respectful of the agency's independence, which is essential for a credible system. The panel concludes that UIB's involvement in the Consortium does not interfere with AQUIB's independence.

The panel also discussed potential future developments if the Balearic university system were to expand with more universities (private). The Consortium that created the agency consists only of the Balearic government and UIB. A system expansion would likely necessitate more significant changes and modifications to the statutes. The panel heard different opinions on the likelihood of such developments and believes that all involved actors will need to collaborate to address this challenge if it arises. However, this scenario does not appear imminent.

Summing up all pieces of evidence the review panel's conclusions on the three dimensions of independence are the following:

### *Organisational independence*

AQUIB's structural independence is rooted in its foundational statutes and the legislative framework that governs its operations. The current 2005 statutes limit full independence due to the predominant government and UIB representation on the Board of Directors. The new 2024 statutes, once enacted, will substantially increase AQUIB's structural independence by expanding the Board to include representatives from the national and international higher education community, broader society, and students. This change aims to complete AQUIB's full organizational independence, aligning with its core values and strategic goals. Currently, the absence of diverse stakeholder representation poses a challenge, but the adoption and full implementation of the new statutes will ensure a more balanced and autonomous governance structure.

### *Operational independence*

Operational independence at AQUIB is maintained through robust internal structures and impartial evaluation processes. The agency's technical committees, such as the Advisory Commission, Guarantees Commission, and Criteria Commission are designed to function independently, with members appointed through public competitions and sourced from outside the Balearic Islands higher education system to ensure unbiased perspectives. The Technical Director, who runs the agency, operates with complete freedom and accountability only to the Board of Directors, without direct government interference. This structure ensures that AQUIB's evaluation activities remain neutral and credible. The integration of external independent experts in evaluation panels further reinforces this operational independence, ensuring that the agency's assessments are free from local biases and external influences.

### *Independence of formal outcomes*

AQUIB's independence in formal outcomes is ensured through a carefully designed decision-making system that excludes local members from the Balearic Islands higher education system from participating in evaluation commissions (CET). The Criteria Commission, responsible for approving evaluation guidelines and criteria, does not engage in the actual evaluation processes, maintaining an impartial stance. Every individual involved in AQUIB's activities adheres to a strict Code of Ethics, emphasizing independence and confidentiality. Despite being almost entirely dependent on public funding from the regional government, AQUIB maintains statutory independence in budget allocation to fulfil its activities. This separation of powers ensures that the agency's formal outcomes remain unbiased and credible.

### **Panel recommendation**

R2. AQUIB is recommended to implement the composition of the Board of Directors with a balanced and broad representation as foreseen and intended by the new statutes, overcoming the limitation enforced by the law 7/2010, article 20.3.

### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

## ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

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



## **Evidence**

At the national level, AQUIB collaborates on the establishment of the REACU report on External Quality Assurance at Spanish Higher Education Institutions, which is publicly available.

At the regional level, a study on academic drop-out rates in the Balearic and Canary islands was recently conducted by AQUIB in collaboration with ACCUEE, the Canary QA agency. The report has been published.

More recently, AQUIB has developed a Thematic Analysis Protocol, approved by the Advisory Commission in December 2023, to establish a systematic approach for conducting thematic analyses based on the results of its activities. This protocol, publicly accessible on AQUIB's website, covers several key aspects.

First, the protocol emphasizes systematisation, explaining the nature of thematic analysis, its frequency, and the criteria for selecting themes. Second, it outlines the scope, focusing on comprehensive thematic analyses derived from AQUIB's evaluation results. These analyses can be broad, encompassing all results, or specific, targeting particular topics. Third, the protocol details a five-step process for elaboration: selecting themes and defining the scope, assigning responsibility, developing the analysis, sharing the findings, and assessing the impact. This structured approach ensures thorough and impactful thematic analyses, enhancing the value and application of AQUIB's evaluation outcomes.

As mentioned in the SAR, the first analysis using this format is ongoing and focuses on the teaching staff accreditation activity, covering reports spanning a period of 19 years. During the interview with AQUIB's technical staff, the review panel learned that the next topic will be decided in December 2024, based on the meta-evaluations conducted at the end of each year. The selection will depend on the intersection between identified priorities and available resources. During interviews, AQUIB's staff mentioned a potential future analysis on comparing programs before their first accreditation and after the second cycle of accreditation, assessing impact and common trends.

## **Analysis**

A Thematic Analysis Protocol has been adopted, is in place, and is being implemented by AQUIB. Although the first topic chosen does not fall within the scope of the ESG, the review panel finds this choice highly relevant for stakeholders, demonstrating a fit-for-purpose approach.

After discussions with AQUIB's technical staff, it is clear to the review panel that the agency has developed robust ideas on thematic topics covering horizontal issues and providing guidance on best practices for QA activities.

The review panel supports the agency's initial topic choice and its relevance to stakeholders, which aligns with their strategic approach. The panel believes it might be beneficial for AQUIB to select future topics in collaboration with the main regional stakeholders, who could base their work or decisions on these analyses. Given the large amount of published data relevant to UIB, the main beneficiary of AQUIB's activities, the panel sees potential in evaluating aspects that are easier to measure in a smaller system with fewer variables. This could include assessing the impact of EQA on the attractiveness of study offerings, student-centred learning, programme structure, and teaching methodology.

In conclusion, the review panel strongly supports AQUIB's established protocol and its first implementation, highlighting its suitability and relevance for the HE system within the Balearic Islands. The panel underlines the agency's compliance based on this evidence and the promising direction of their thematic analysis efforts. To ensure comprehensive coverage, it is important for AQUIB to

regularly include areas relevant under the scope of ESG in their thematic analyses. This would ideally be done in cooperation with UIB to align with stakeholders' needs and enhance the overall effectiveness of the quality assurance process.

### **Panel recommendation**

R3. AQUIB is recommended to assure that the areas relevant under the scope of ESG are covered by thematic analysis on a regular basis, ideally in cooperation with UIB.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

### **Evidence**

#### *Human resources*

According to Article 61 of Law 7/2010, the staff serving the Consortium must be civil servants or workers from the Consortium administrations, specifically from the Balearic Government's Conselleria and the UIB. Exceptionally, the Consortium may hire its own personnel. In practice, most of the staff are currently external and employed directly by the Agency, making the exception the general rule for AQUIB. This framework will not change with the new 2024 statutes, according to draft article 39.

According to the Balearic government's job descriptions (Relación de Puestos de Trabajo), there are plans to hire a total of 19 people for AQUIB. Currently, there are 6 staff members employed: a technical director, an administrative manager and four quality technicians. Half of the staff holds permanent positions, including the Technical Director and the administrative manager, both of whom have been working in the agency for 20 years. The remaining positions are expected to become permanent in the coming years, and the creation of new positions is structurally possible, although there is no formal long-term strategic human resources planning in place.

As seen above (Evidence under ESG 3.3), the current Technical Director has been performing the duties of the Director for many years, as no new Director has been appointed since December 2009. This would have involved a fixed-term mandate subject to political nomination and typical turnover. The Technical Director operates the agency with complete freedom and is accountable only to the Board of Directors, without direct interaction with the government. During a meeting with stakeholders (REACU), it was highlighted that one of AQUIB's differentiating values is the stability of its management due to the long-term continuity of the Technical Director.

AQUIB's management system under ISO 9001 includes an annual training plan for its staff, which is dynamically updated based on identified staff needs. Each year, the Technical Director validates the training courses completed by staff. Additionally, AQUIB staff can participate in national and international conferences and events, including ENQA meetings and other relevant conferences.

### *Technology resources*

In addition to the database of experts AQUIB relies on a specialised software applications called AVATIT, dedicated to managing external evaluations of study programmes. Thanks to this online platform, the university can upload its self-assessment and supporting evidence, accessible to external experts, who, in turn provide and sign external evaluation reports directly on the platform. Other Spanish QA agencies also use the same software, although each agency customises the application to meet its guidelines and style.

### *Financial resources*

AQUIB's budget is a distinct item within the total budget of the Government of the Balearic Islands (CAIB), approved annually by the Parliament of the Balearic Islands. The primary funding source is the CAIB, with additional contributions from the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB) due to legal requirements as a Consortium member and to cover part of the external evaluations conducted by AQUIB. This financial arrangement does not compromise AQUIB's independence, as commented under ESG 3.3. In 2023, AQUIB's budget was €481,150, a 28.19% increase from 2022, reflecting steady support from regional authorities.

The increase in AQUIB's budget is attributed to the agency's expansion and strategic initiatives. This includes a focus on internationalisation, the creation of new positions, and preparation for future responsibilities, such as performing ex ante accreditations. Notably, the budget includes salaries for three new positions starting in September 2024 and costs associated with AQUIB's ENQA review. Despite these expansions, AQUIB concludes each fiscal year with a balanced budget, having positive balances from 2013 to 2022, and a zero balance in 2023 due to the ENQA review fee. Annual accounting audits ensure transparency, with reports available on AQUIB's website. To enhance financial stability, AQUIB is exploring multi-annual funding agreements and alternative funding sources, aligned with its strategic objectives to expand internationally and secure additional funding opportunities.

### **Analysis**

According to the law, staff serving the Consortium should be civil servants or workers from the Consortium administrations. However, the law allows for exceptions, if operational needs require direct hiring to ensure adequate staffing. In hiring AQUIB's own personnel, this exception has become the norm, with most staff being external and directly employed by AQUIB. This shows flexibility in staffing, allowing AQUIB to recruit necessary talent beyond the Consortium's administrations, allowing for operational effectiveness.

In a holistic overall long-term planning, the Balearic government plans up to 19 positions staff units for AQUIB, whilst only 6 are currently filled. This is an agile measure enabling to increase AQUIB's staff as its scope and activities would increase, depending as well on the outcome of the present external review. If listed in ENQA/EQAR, the agency can not only continue its activities within the scope of the ESG, but it may also take on additional activities currently performed by ANECA (ex ante accreditation of study programmes and its modification) or by AQU Catalunya (accreditation of art study programs, an activity likely to increase in terms of volume in the Balearic Islands when also Bachelor's degrees will need compulsory accreditation – a Spanish law is under adoption).

The fact that the Technical Director has been performing the duties of the Director for many years due to the absence of an officially appointed director has provided stability in management, which is viewed positively by stakeholders. However, it deviates from the intended governance structure and may pose risks related to accountability and strategic leadership, particularly if the agency grows, as foreseen. A lot is dependent on a single person which has no deputy or replacement. According to the draft new statutes the function of the Director will no longer depend on political appointment and

government turn-over (which was the reason why AQUIB opted so far for avoiding filling the position, being such a small entity and requiring full operational independence). The Director will be selected following a public competition and it was confirmed during the on-site visit that, as soon as the new statutes will be adopted, the public call will be launched.

While the Agency manages to meet its operational needs with current human resources, there are also areas for future improvement, particularly in strategic HR planning and achieving the planned staffing levels if the scope of the activities is confirmed or increased. It became also evident that legal questions strongly depend on external advice. While there is no immediate gap, addressing the agency's identified future needs will be important for ensuring long-term stability and operational excellence. The previously mentioned holistic long-term planning provides a suitable framework for this.

Financial stability ensures that AQUIB has the necessary funds to support its operations and initiatives, thereby meeting the financial aspect of the quality standard. AQUIB demonstrates strong financial health with increasing and stable funding, ensuring that financial resources are adequate and appropriate for its needs. In view of the growing activities of the agency in the future, it might be good to explore further the alternative of multi-annual funding schemes, maybe aligned to the strategic planning period, allowing for even greater flexibility and autonomy.

#### **Panel commendation**

C3. AQUIB is commended for its positive work environment and collaborative culture among staff members, which are significant strengths contributing to the agency's effective operations.

#### **Panel suggestion for further improvement**

S2. The review panel suggests AQUIB to hire someone with a juridical background, in filling future open positions.

#### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

### ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

AQUIB has implemented an Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) certified under ISO 9001 since 2007 and has renewed this certification four times. This system includes clearly defined key procedures, objectives, scope, and related processes and indicators. It also covers strategic, management, and support procedures. This information is available on the agency's website. The latest addition to this is the communication protocol which formalises existing practices. The review panel also learned during the interviews that this communication protocol is a result of past and preparation for future growth of the agency and it regulates internal but also external communication.

According to the SAR, one of AQUIB's main instruments of IQA is the annual meta-evaluation, an essential element for collecting stakeholder feedback through open exchange. At the end of the year, AQUIB conducts meetings with participating institutions in each activity. These sessions, called meta-

evaluations, are intended to collect their feedback, concerns and suggestions for improvement through open communication, providing a space for the university and government representatives to freely express their views and establish a dialogue.

Additionally, everyone involved in evaluations participates in a survey at the end of the year or after completing their assignment. During interviews, the review panel learned from UIB representatives and stakeholders that they are aware of the meta-analysis and value the structured opportunity it provides for open feedback. Several interviewees particularly highlighted the agency's openness and receptiveness when discussing procedures and providing feedback.

In terms of professional conduct, all members of bodies and committees, as well as individual collaborators, are subject to a Code of Ethics and sign a confidentiality agreement. Staff members also sign a comparable document along with an additional declaration defining their role and position in the agency's work. Moreover, AQUIB provides staff training, including data protection content, as outlined in the SAR. The review panel received oral confirmation of these practices during the interviews and could check the content of the briefing material used for panel members

### **Analysis**

The review panel is highly impressed by the comprehensive Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system in place. Despite the agency's small size, it employs a remarkably broad and deep approach to internal quality. The implementation of ISO 9001 ensures well-designed processes, resulting in clearly defined responsibilities and expectations.

There is excellent alignment between the meta-analysis statements and the feedback from stakeholders, suggesting that this mechanism is highly valued. Stakeholders are not only aware of the meta-analysis but also actively share their discussions and the positive impact these evaluations have had on them.

The agency's communication protocol is thought to regulate both internal and external communication. During the external review, it was noted that stakeholders had varying levels of knowledge on certain issues. Therefore, the communication protocol must ensure that all relevant stakeholders are informed quickly and efficiently about developments affecting their areas of activity or competencies.

### **Panel commendations**

C4. AQUIB is commended for the instrument of meta-evaluation, which stakeholders perceive as an important, structured, and efficient opportunity to provide open feedback and discuss improvement measures.

C5. AQUIB is commended for the professional conduct of its staff. The expertise and dedication of staff significantly contribute to the agency's effectiveness and the high regard in which it is held by the region it serves.

### **Panel suggestion**

S3. The review panel suggests AQUIB to consider developing quick news reaching targeted stakeholders with latest news or developments of the agency, in implementing the communication protocol.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:

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

### Evidence

This is AQUIB's first review against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The agency plans to undergo a progress visit after two years.

Spanish legislation mandates that AQUIB must be a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Consequently, AQUIB is required to be aligned with the ESG and undertake an external review at least every five years. Without this ENQA/EQAR recognition, AQUIB cannot perform ex ante accreditations of study programmes. Additionally, after October 2025, the agency will be unable to conduct ex post accreditations and follow-ups without meeting this requirement.

### Analysis

AQUIB is currently undergoing its first review against the ESG. This review is conducted within the framework of Spanish legislation, which imposes specific requirements on quality assurance agencies. According to Spanish law, AQUIB must achieve membership in ENQA and be listed in EQAR.

Since this is AQUIB's first external review, the cyclicity of undergoing reviews every five years cannot have been implemented yet. However, Spanish legislation mandates this periodic review as a fundamental requirement. Consequently, this ensures that AQUIB will be checked and enforced for compliance with the ESG standards regularly.

If the outcomes of this external review are favourable, enabling AQUIB to secure ENQA membership and EQAR listing, it will automatically commit the agency to undergoing an external review at least every five years. This frequency aligns with ESG requirements, and compliance with these standards is a mandated prerequisite for all quality assurance agencies operating within the Spanish jurisdiction. Therefore, compliance with the standard in this case is based on the evidence available about intentionality and legal requirements, rather than on concrete instances of regular reviews every five years, which is impossible to demonstrate at this stage, being the first review.

**Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

### ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

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

## Evidence

Considering the follow-up and ex post accreditation of study programmes (group A activities in this report) all standards from I.1 to I.10 are incorporated into AQUIB's 7 assessment criteria, as shown in Figure 3, drawn from the SAR, backed-up by various protocols and framework documents. These include:

- The REACU Protocol for the follow-up and renewal of accreditation of official university bachelor's and master's degrees, as outlined in Royal Decree 822/2021.
- The REACU Protocol for the monitoring and renewal of the accreditation of doctoral programs leading to the award of the official doctoral degree.
- AQUIB's Framework documents for the evaluation of recognized university education and degree programs.
- The AQUIB Self-evaluation guide for the renewal of accreditation of recognized bachelor's and master's degree courses.
- AQUIB's Template for drafting the self-assessment report of bachelor's and master's degree programs.

ESG I.1, I.4, I.5, I.6, I.7, I.8, I.9, I.10 find explicit correspondence in AQUIB's 7 assessment criteria, as described in the SAR and confirmed during interviews.

As for Student-Centred Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (ESG I.3), correspondence is more implicit, even if incorporated in AQUIB's assessment criteria. In the follow-up processes the assessment focuses on competencies, curriculum coherence, as well as teaching planning and methods. In the ex post accreditation processes, the emphasis is on organization, learning outcomes, performance indicators, and labour market/graduate destination indicators. Although student-centred learning is not explicitly addressed as a distinct evaluation topic, it is assessed through indicators related to learning experience, programme satisfaction, final degree projects, thesis works, success and drop-out rates, interviews with students, teaching methodologies, and exam types adapted to intended learning outcomes. This approach was noted during the meeting with representatives of the reviewer pool.

| FOLLOW-UP AND EX POST ACCREDITATION |  | ESG CRITERIA   |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| I. MANAGEMENT OF THE DEGREE         | 1. Curriculum development and deployment     | 1.2. Programme design and approval<br>1.4. Admission, development, recognition, and certification of the student body<br>1.3. Student-centred teaching, learning and assessment<br>1.6. Resources for learning and student support |
|                                     | 2. Information and transparency              | 1.8. Public information  |
|                                     | 3. Quality assurance, review and improvement | 1.1. Quality assurance policy<br>1.9. Continuous follow-up and regular evaluation of the programmes<br>1.10 Cyclical External Quality Assurance  |
| II. RESOURCES                       | 4. Academic and teaching support staff       | 1.5. Teaching staff  |
|                                     | 5. Resources for learning                    | 1.6. Resources for learning and student support  |
| III. RESULTS                        | 6. Learning results                          | 1.2. Programme design and approval   |
|                                     | 7. Satisfaction and graduation               | 1.7. Information management  |

**Figure 3.** Correlation between AQUIB's standards with Part I of the ESG

As for ESG I.2, the relevance of the involvement of stakeholders might improve in terms of alignment with student learning outcomes and the expectations from the professional world. In fact, according to the guidelines under ESG I.2, programme design should involve students and other stakeholders. While AQUIB does consider the opinions of stakeholders during external assessments (follow-up and ex post accreditation), it is not entirely clear how extensively these opinions influence the design and approval of programs. Students' opinions are gathered through interviews and satisfaction surveys. However, during the on-site visit, students mentioned that there could be more focused forms of involvement. They emphasized the need for achieving practical competencies alongside theoretical ones, suggesting a potential paradigm shift. Students also pointed out that some modules could be better articulated to avoid redundancies and increase coherence. While academics are sufficiently consulted, external stakeholders such as professional organizations do not have formal or practical involvement in programme design.

Considering the remaining activities (B-C activities as defined in the introductory chapter of the present report), the basis lies in the following documents:

- The AQUIB Framework documents for quality assessment in higher arts education (available in AQUIB's website only in Spanish<sup>4</sup>).
- The AQU VSMA (Validation, Modification, Monitoring, Accreditation) Programme and the ANECA DOCENTIA programme.

As pointed out in the introduction of the present report, DOCENTIA has not been re-launched yet. According to ESG I.9, monitoring and periodic review should take place regularly. However, since the pilot procedure of 2009, the programme has not been updated. In ANECA's website it appears as

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aquib.es/en/actividades/artisticas>.



"new design not submitted". The SAR offers the following correspondence grid, which is hard to evaluate due to a lack of assessments since the 2009 pilot:

| ESG      | 1.1    | 1.2    | 1.3    | 1.4  | 1.5        | 1.6    | 1.7      | 1.8      | 1.9      | 1.10  |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|------|------------|--------|----------|----------|----------|---|
| DOCENTIA | Axis 1 | Axis 2 | Axis 2 | N.A. | Axis 1,2,3 | Axis 2 | Axis 2,3 | Axis 1,3 | Axis 2,3 | Once obtained, it must be renewed every 5 years |

**Figure 4.** Correlation between DOCENTIA programme criteria and the Part I of the ESG

As for the art study programmes, the assessment is conducted by AQU Catalunya according to the VSMA Programme. Proof on the compliance with this standard is given in the published report of the external review of AQU Catalunya, under ESG 2.1<sup>5</sup>. So far, AQUIB was involved in coordinating one ex ante accreditation of a single Master's degree, performed by AQU Catalunya. At the time the external review of AQUIB took place, the given Master's programme had not yet been implemented. The SAR offers the following correspondence grid between the VSMS Programme criteria and Part I of the ESG.

| AQU VSMA PROGRAMME  | ESG CRITERIA  |
|---|---|
| 9. Internal quality assurance system  | 1.1. Quality assurance policy   |
| 1. Description of the title<br>2. Justification<br>3. Competences<br>5. Programme's planning<br>8. Expected results | 1.2. Programme design and approval  |
| 3. Competences<br>5. Programme's planning<br>8. Expected results  | 1.3. Student-centred teaching, learning and assessment                          |
| 4. Student access and admissions  | 1.4. Admission, development, recognition, and certification of the student body |
| 6. Teaching and support staff   | 1.5. Teaching staff   |
| 7. Material resources and services  | 1.6. Resources for learning and student support                                 |
| 9. Internal quality assurance system  | 1.7. Information management   |
| 9. Internal quality assurance system  | 1.8. Public information   |
| 9. Internal quality assurance system  | 1.9. Continuous follow-up and regular evaluation of the programmes              |
| Procedure   | 1.10. Cyclical External Quality Assurance                                       |

**Figure 5.** Correlation between AQU's standards with Part I of the ESG

## Analysis

Based on the provided evidence, AQUIB demonstrates a strong alignment with the quality standard requiring external quality assurance to address the effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes as described in Part I of the ESG. AQUIB has effectively translated all standards 1.1 to 1.10 into its assessment criteria through various protocols and framework documents. These include REACU Protocols for evaluation and accreditation, AQUIB's framework documents for quality assessment in higher education, and specific guides and templates for self-evaluation. This comprehensive documentation ensures that the fundamental principles of internal quality assurance are systematically integrated into AQUIB's external evaluation activities.

<sup>5</sup> [https://backend.deqar.eu/reports/EQAR/04\\_AQU\\_Catalunya\\_external\\_review\\_report.pdf](https://backend.deqar.eu/reports/EQAR/04_AQU_Catalunya_external_review_report.pdf).

ESG 1.1 – Policy for quality assurance: AQUIB considers comprehensive quality assurance policies, reflecting this in all its evaluations. The presence and implementation of QA policies include feedback from various stakeholders.

ESG 1.2 – Design and approval of programmes: AQUIB's accreditations (follow-up and ex post) focus on programme design and approval. However, AQUIB could still enhance its processes. While student opinions are considered through interviews and satisfaction surveys, there is room for more targeted and systematic involvement of students and other stakeholders in the design and approval of programmes. The current methods do not fully capture the practical competencies and coherence that students and stakeholders deem essential. More structured mechanisms to engage students and external stakeholders could improve the relevance and responsiveness of the programmes.

ESG 1.3 – Student-Centred learning, teaching, and assessment: the agency's commitment is evident in both documentation and stakeholder feedback. However, student-centred learning is not explicitly evaluated as a distinct topic. Although the issue is well present in the framework with different wordings, it is assessed through various performance indicators, interviews, and success metrics; the focus could be more explicitly on student-centred approaches. This could include encouraging innovative teaching methods and active student participation in the learning process. By raising awareness of stakeholders and reviewers and integrating explicit evaluations of student-centred learning, AQUIB could even better align with the expectations of this standard.

ESG 1.4 – Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification: AQUIB evaluates this standard across all study programmes, focusing on applicant qualifications, admission procedures, and academic rules. Experts assess the effectiveness of academic recognition procedures as well.

ESG 1.5 – Teaching Staff: AQUIB evaluates teaching staff quality in all its procedures. The evaluation process covers the selection, competence and professional development of teaching staff, its involvement in research and the link between education and research. The DOCENTIA procedure specifically addresses the quality of teaching staff.

ESG 1.6 – Learning resources and student support: AQUIB considers this standard in all evaluations, primarily focusing on student support services. DOCENTIA indirectly reviews student-related matters.

ESG 1.7 – Information management: institutions must demonstrate systematic data collection and analysis, especially in internal quality assurance during programme reviews.

ESG 1.8 – Public Information: AQUIB emphasizes the importance of public information in its external quality assurance processes. Evaluation procedures assess the publication of student and admission information. Follow-up and ex post accreditation processes specifically address this aspect.

ESG 1.9 – On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes: AQUIB ensures ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes through its assessment methods. These components are critical in evaluating internal quality assurance systems and programme development for Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees. DOCENTIA does not seem having been reviewed since the pilot procedure that took place in 2009. Since then, no activities were conducted. Representatives of the UIB's management do agree the system is now ready to re-launch DOCENTIA.

ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance: compliance with cyclical external quality assurance is mandated by law, requiring external reviews of programmes every 6-7 years. DOCENTIA is in principle foreseen every 5 years. However, only a pilot assessment took place in 2009, with no periodicity established.

In summary, AQUIB meets the quality standard through well-documented and systematic processes. However, there is a need for more intensive stakeholder involvement in programme design, explicit focus on student-centred learning, and proactive measures to ensure the re-launch of DOCENTIA with the implementation of dedicated teaching staff self-evaluations.

### **Panel recommendation**

R4: AQUIB is recommended to put emphasis on how to implement areas such as innovation in teaching and learning, encouraging students to take an active role in their learning process and more involvement in the design of programmes.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

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

### **Evidence**

AQUIB implements ex post evaluations and follow-up programmes<sup>6</sup> to monitor and ensure the continued quality and compliance of accredited institutions and programmes. These activities are designed for this purpose and procedural steps are described in published guides for users<sup>7</sup>:

- Protocolo de evaluación para el seguimiento y la renovación de la acreditación de los títulos universitarios oficiales de grado y máster universitario (REACU)
- Protocolo de evaluación para el seguimiento y la renovación de la acreditación de los programas de doctorado conducentes a la obtención del título oficial de doctor/a (REACU)
- AQUIB's Framework document for the evaluation of official university study programmes
- AQUIB's Self-Assessment guide for ex post accreditation of official university Bachelor's and Master's degree courses
- AQUIB's Self-assessment guide for ex post accreditation of official university PhD programmes
- AQUIB's Template for the Self-Assessment of official university Bachelor's and Master's study programmes
- AQUIB's External evaluation guide for ex post accreditation of official university study programmes
- AQUIB's External evaluation guide for follow-up accreditation of official university study programmes
- AQUIB's Procedure of recusal of members of external expert panels

Verification of higher artistic education degrees (in music, dance, dramatic art, conservation and restoration of cultural assets, design and plastic arts) which are dependant of the Department of Education of the Balearic Islands Government is carried out through a collaborative agreement with the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya). These are the instruments publicly

<sup>6</sup> Link to [Ex post and follow-up programmes](#).

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aquib.es/en/actividades/renovacion-acreditacion>.

available (in Spanish only) for assessing art study programmes (ex ante, ex post, follow-up), designed to address the specific aspects of these educational programmes<sup>8</sup>:

- Documento Marco
- Guía de autoevaluación para la renovación de la acreditación de las enseñanzas artísticas oficiales de máster
- Guía de evaluación externa para la renovación de la acreditación de las enseñanzas artísticas oficiales de máster
- Guía de evaluación externa para el seguimiento de las enseñanzas artísticas oficiales de máster

The objective of DOCENTIA is to address the demands of universities and the educational system's need for establishing its own mechanisms to assess the quality of teaching activities undertaken by its faculty, thereby promoting the improvement and recognition of such activities. In January 2007, ANECA and AQUIB signed a collaboration agreement to implement the DOCENTIA Programme. In February 2022, the renewal of this agreement was signed, providing continuity to the previous arrangement. The guide and application form are publicly available<sup>9</sup> and aim the specific object of the programme.

The technical staff at AQUIB takes the lead in drafting various guidelines, which are then shared with stakeholders for their valuable input. The final versions of these documents undergo thorough discussion and approval by the Criteria Commission. Throughout these processes, consideration is given to national and regional laws, as well as the framework set by REACU.

The system is designed to ensure it meets the minimum organizational, financial, and procedural standards required by law. This compliance is fundamental to the agency's operation and credibility, still being able to customise this framework in its guidelines to the reality of the Balearic Islands HE system. This is made possible thanks to the constant dialogue with stakeholders, especially assured through meta-evaluations. Annual meta-evaluations ensure continuous improvement and relevance of AQUIB's quality assurance processes. This collaborative evaluation process engages stakeholders in meaningful discussions about the effectiveness and efficiency of the agency's operations.

The agency gathers feedback as well through stakeholder surveys<sup>10</sup>, which are instrumental in assessing the impact and effectiveness of external quality assurance activities. The survey results provide insights into stakeholders' perceptions and highlight areas for improvement. AQUIB also organizes meetings with internal commissions, including the Guarantees Commission and Criteria Commission. These interactions are essential for aligning the agency's quality assurance activities with its strategic goals and regulatory requirements.

The agency formally involves stakeholders through its Advisory and Criteria commissions. These commissions play a crucial role in designing, defining, and refining quality assurance processes to meet established aims and objectives. One member of the Criteria Commission serves on the CET as well, ensuring coherence and fitness for purpose by bridging these bodies.

## **Analysis**

In designing External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities, the Spanish legal framework provides clear guidance. The criteria primarily focus on inputs, with some attention to processes and less emphasis

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aquib.es/en/actividades/artisticas>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.aquib.es/en/actividades/Docentia>.

<sup>10</sup> Link to [The Survey Results of Stakeholders](#).

on outputs, which could be enhanced to better demonstrate the added value for evaluated units. To assess the accountability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the outcomes of the QA process more effectively, the system has room for further development. While the current system is fit for purpose, AQUIB could leverage its small size and singular focus on one university to become more proactive and innovative. This approach could optimize the relationship between resources invested and the resulting improvements in higher education and research in the Balearic Islands.

Feedback collected in meta-evaluation meetings is analysed to identify areas for improvement. Heads of accredited programs reported that they participated in well-planned and coordinated meta-evaluations with AQUIB. Stakeholder suggestions for process improvements are thoroughly considered by the agency. There is a professional relationship between UIB and AQUIB, and student representatives positively view their involvement in the agency's activities. Stakeholders describe AQUIB as close, reactive, professional, independent, and realistic.

In terms of designing methodologies fit for purpose, faculty deans mentioned that they are in contact with AQUIB to design accreditation protocols, offering their opinions and recommendations. There is strong collaboration between UIB and AQUIB in designing the assessment of programs. However, stakeholders noted that the level of bureaucracy is generally too high relative to the results produced. Methodologies could be improved by reducing excessive bureaucracy.

An issue of initial curiosity for the review panel was the overlap of one academic representative between the CET and Criteria commissions. Different discussions during the visit however clearly indicated that this provides with the opportunity to transfer the experience of practical cases from CET to the design and continuous improvement work done by the Criteria Commission. Vice versa it enables the CET to clearly know what the procedure was meant to achieve in its application. Consequently, the review panel concludes this to be good practice.

Based on the evidence presented, the review panel believes that AQUIB's procedures are well-defined, considering national and regional laws, and are tailored to the Balearic Islands' HE system. Guides prepared by AQUIB are shared with stakeholders for feedback, with the Criteria Commission approving the final versions. All guidelines and procedures are accessible online. Meta-evaluation meetings allow stakeholders to express their concerns and comments freely, and the agency values these opinions. The agency also makes efforts to include more students in its activities.

The review panel concludes that AQUIB's approach to designing and defining external quality assurance processes involves active stakeholder engagement, continuous improvement practices, and adherence to legal standards. The agency's quality assurance activities are estimated by all stakeholders as fit for purpose and effective.

The external quality assurance system could operate more flexibly if institutions demonstrate effective internal quality assurance, paving the way for institutional accreditation. However, institutional accreditation in the Balearic Islands is not expected soon. The agency must first be registered with ENQA/EQAR, and all UIB units be structurally ready, which is work in progress. This goal is included in UIB's Strategic Plan for 2026. The review panel encourages AQUIB to start working on this issue with UIB once the agency is in ENQA.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

S4. The review panel suggests AQUIB to re-evaluate methodologies by involving stakeholders and students, reducing bureaucracy, maximizing the quality of higher education provisions, and preparing for the upcoming developments.

S5. The review panel suggests AQUIB to consider institutionalising the currently implemented overlap in membership between CET and the Criteria Commission.

## Panel conclusion: compliant

### ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

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

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

#### Evidence

AQUIB provides online guides and templates for all activities and procedures. This ensures that all stakeholders have access to documentation and guidelines, promoting transparency in the evaluation process.

All ex post accreditations and the DOCENTIA external quality assurance processes follow the four pre-defined procedural steps: a self-assessment, an external assessment with an on-site visit, a report resulting from the external assessment, and a follow-up. Ex ante accreditations of arts study programme and all follow-up procedures do not include an on-site visit, as shown in Figure 6, drawn from the SAR. Ex ante accreditation of arts study programme is assessing the design of a programme, before its implementation. That is why the on-site visit does not take place, as there is no programme running at the stage of the ex ante accreditation. Additionally, the absence of an on-site visit is justified for several reasons. First, ex ante accreditation focuses on evaluating the programme design, so there are no students, processes, or outcomes to assess on-site. A visit would therefore add little value. Second, considering resource economy, on-site visits require mobilizing expert panels and incur significant costs. On-site visits are therefore reserved for ex-post accreditations, where the programme's actual operation can be observed, feedback can be gathered, concrete improvements can be recommended, and applicable changes can be followed up during subsequent follow-up procedures.

AQUIB's follow-up is an intermediate stage focussing on the recommendations from ex ante reports (issued by ANECA for activities of the A group, as defined by the review panel in this report). Then, ex post accreditation evaluates how issues raised in the previous follow-up have been addressed. The next follow-up then focuses on the recommendations made in last ex post accreditation report. In principle, this process also applies to art study programmes. Being intermediate steps in the full accreditation cycle, follow-ups do not foresee an on-site visit.

In the case of follow-up assessment of official study programmes the evaluation is made directly by the relevant CET sub-commission, involving five of its members. This is because the university is primarily responsible for the follow-up process of its study programmes and must use the instruments provided for in its Internal Quality Assurance System (SIGC), while AQUIB acts as an external evaluation agent with the aim of guaranteeing quality in the provision of higher education services. The follow-up process of official university education is intended to be a significant element in the strategy of continuous improvement of the quality of higher university education. The general evaluation procedure for the follow-up of study programmes is detailed in the programme's Framework Document available on the website of AQUIB.

| Programme                   | Procedure             | SAR | External review | Site visit | Final report | Appeals | Follow-up |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----|-----------------|------------|--------------|---------|-----------|
| <i>Study programmes</i>     | Follow-up             | x   | x               |            | x            | x       | x         |
|                             | Ex post accreditation | x   | x               | x          | x            | x       | x         |
| <i>Art study programmes</i> | Ex ante accreditation | x   | x               |            | x            | x       | x         |
|                             | Follow-up             | x   | x               |            | x            | x       | x         |
|                             | Ex post accreditation | x   | x               | x          | x            | x       | x         |
| <i>Institutional</i>        | DOCENTIA              | x   | x               | x          | x            | x       | x         |

**Figure 6.** Main steps of AQUIB's activities under the scope of the ESG

Site visits last usually two days and are conducted by evaluation panels typically consisting of three members: two academics (one serving as chair) and a student member. An individual briefing for expert panel members is offered, based on a PowerPoint presentation. This briefing helps panel members understand their roles and the procedures, ensuring a consistent approach to evaluations.

An additional QA expert, member of the CET commission, participates in the assessment process. Although this expert usually does not attend the on-site visit, he/she evaluates the QA criterion based on self-assessment documents and provide specific questions for the panel to ask during the visit. According to agency staff and the SAR preparation team, the CET's QA expert reviews documentation before the on-site visit and may provide questions for the panel. Theoretically, the QA expert could also participate in the visit, if justified, but this role is not widely recognized as it basically never happens.

AQUIB staff members act as secretaries and coordinators during the assessment process. They ensure procedural consistency and facilitate communication between the evaluation panel, CET, and UIB, but do not contribute to the report or decision-making process.

The AVATIT platform integrates all self-documentation submitted by institutions. Experts use this platform to upload their evaluations, and the CET QA members upload their QA criterion evaluations, ensuring that all relevant information is accessible and organized. From the expert panel's evaluations uploaded on AVATIT (evidence and comments after the on-site visit, called EV) to the CET final report with an accreditation decision (called IFA<sup>11</sup>), the procedure and roles are clearly defined in the design. However, implementation can vary according to different sources of information (please refer to the pieces of evidence under standard 2.6).

Inconsistencies also exist regarding when and how the report is sent to HEIs. CET members draft the initial provisional report (called IPA<sup>12</sup>) based on the expert panel's visit report EV, which may be adapted for consistency. Which version is sent to the institution for collecting comments is not always clear to all. The CET decision-making process is also somewhat unclear, with some members stating decisions are made by consensus, while others mention majority rule. However, in practice consensus is always applied. This is confirmed by all interviewed actors, also because the evidence and assessments requested in reports are often more quantitative than qualitative, then easy to agree

<sup>11</sup> Informe Final de Renovación de la Acreditación.

<sup>12</sup> Informe Provisional de Renovación de la Acreditación.

upon. This emphasis on quantitative data highlights the need for a balanced approach that also considers qualitative insights, confirmed during the interviews on site.

As for the DOCENTIA programme, after a successful report, the institution is given two years to implement the model, which is then subject to continuous monitoring by QA agencies. At the moment, AQUIB has not conducted this monitoring yet, as UIB has so far not implemented this voluntary programme.

### **Analysis**

AQUIB's external quality assurance processes are pre-defined, well-accepted by all involved parties, considered highly useful, accessible, and published. They follow the four procedural steps indicated by the standard, and these processes are generally implemented consistently, making the system reliable and accountable.

However, some areas leave room for improvement to enhance clarity and coherence among all stakeholders involved in the process. In particular, the review panel identified during the onsite visit different levels of knowledge among stakeholders in describing the process going from programme evaluation by expert panels to the final published CET report. The fragmentation of the process, involving many actors, steps, consultations, and interim stages, generates some confusion if the various actors are asked to describe steps out of their direct responsibility. While everyone has an idea of their own individual role, the comprehension of the entire process varies, leading to gaps in knowledge about intermediate steps.

For example, there are little discrepancies in the understanding of roles among different stakeholders. For instance, the role of the QA expert in the CET is not uniformly understood. While key staff of the agency and CET members describe the QA expert's involvement before the expert panel's on-site visit, including reviewing documentation and potentially participating in the visit, this information is not uniformly known among other stakeholders. Heads of accredited programs are unaware of the QA expert's specific role.

The process of drafting and finalizing reports also reveals some different levels of knowledge. The expert panel's initial report (EV) undergoes several stages of review and modification by the CET. However, the extent of these changes is unknown by expert panel members, which do not know whether their contributions have been altered for transversal consistency with other reports, and to what extent. Even if CET members onsite explained that most adaptations are of stylistic nature, which could be confirmed by the review panel in comparing a sample of EV reports with the corresponding CET reports. Additionally, there are variations in when and how the report is sent to the HEI, with differing descriptions from CET members and other stakeholders.

Although procedures are designed to be comprehensive, the implementation phase shows little inconsistency of alignment in how these processes are communicated and understood by all parties involved. This can largely be explained by the fact that AQUIB has introduced many improvements recently as part of its engagement in the review process which resulted in varying levels of knowledge among stakeholders, partially justifying the observed inconsistencies. Therefore, there is a need for a "refreshment" for all parties involved to ensure everyone is up to date with the latest procedures and roles.

The review panel emphasises the importance of ensuring that not only does everyone understand their own role in the process, but that the entire process is well-known and equally understood by all stakeholders. Although this is addressed under section 2.6, some CET representatives, expert panel members, and UIB representatives were unaware that EV evidence reports from 2020 have been published since late 2023 and not everybody seemed to understand the added value of the new practice.



By addressing these inconsistencies and enhancing stakeholder communication, AQUIB can improve the transparency and effectiveness of its external quality assurance processes. This will not only ensure compliance with the ESG standards but also foster a more informed evaluation environment. Furthermore, providing updates and refreshment sessions for all stakeholders will help ensure that recent changes are well understood and effectively implemented.

### **Panel recommendation**

R5. AQUIB is recommended to ensure that all stakeholders, including CET representatives, expert panel members and UIB representatives, are effectively informed about the entire external evaluation process. This includes their roles, the steps involved and how their contributions fit into the bigger picture.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

S6. The review panel suggests AQUIB to further clarify the role of the QA expert across all evaluations and ensure all stakeholders are aware of their involvement, whether they participate in on-site visits, provide questions for the panel or are responsible for evaluating a specific criterion from A to Z.

S7. The review panel suggests AQUIB to better outline in its guides what is the procedure for how and when interim/final reports are sent to HEIs and how exactly CET decisions are made and communicated in the reports.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:

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

### **Evidence**

The internal operating rules of the CET and AQUIB panels explicitly mandate the inclusion of student members in the groups of external experts conducting quality assurance evaluations, in all of AQUIB's activities. The composition of all expert panels from 2017 to 2023 consistently includes student members, demonstrating AQUIB's commitment to involving students in the evaluation process. Even in case AQUIB coordinates procedures conducted by ANECA and AQU Catalunya, framework guidelines do foresee the presence of student members in the panels.

In all AQUIB's activities panels are normally composed by 3 members, among which 2 academics and 1 student (1 PhD student for doctoral degrees). Experts from the labour market are absent from the panels. All the experts involved are from outside the Balearic Islands to avoid any conflict of interest.

In the case of follow-up assessment of official study programmes the evaluation is made directly by the relevant CET sub-commission, involving 5 members: a chairperson, two academic members from the branch of knowledge of the study programme, one person designated as rapporteur or secretary and the other as reviewer, one student member, one quality spokesperson.

All members of the expert panels and all evaluators adhere to a Code of Ethics, ensuring integrity and impartiality in the evaluation process. Meetings with members of expert panels, including students, confirm that students actively participate and contribute to the external quality assurance process.

Experts, including students, are selected based on defined procedures approved by the Criteria Commission. Criteria include the quality of professional activity, suitability to the programme's knowledge area, experience in higher education quality assurance, regional representation, conflict of interest prevention, and the inclusion of a current or recent student representative with relevant experience. These procedures ensure that selected experts are compatible with the specific evaluation needs of each quality assurance process. AQUIB maintains a comprehensive database of nearly 1,000 active experts, which includes students. This database facilitates collaboration with other Spanish agencies as needed. The selection of review panel members considers factors like regional representation, experience in QA and absence of conflict of interest. Additionally, diversity among experts from different universities is sought to enhance the breadth of perspectives.

Despite the big number of experts included in the database, the review panel learnt during the on-site visit that AQUIB faces challenges in finding external experts who are both experienced in the academic world and familiar with quality assurance. This difficulty highlights the need for targeted training and development to build capacity in quality assurance expertise. Meantime, criterion 3 on internal quality assurance is transversally assessed by a CET member with expertise in quality assurance, rather than by the panel of experts assessing the other six criteria.

Moreover, SLI of AQUIB's Strategic Plan 2023-2025 foresees a greater internationalisation of the agency, including the involvement of more international experts. However, as discussed on-site, their involvement remains limited to members of the Advisory and Guarantees Commissions, not yet reaching expert panel members, mainly for linguistic reasons, as assessment procedures are conducted in Spanish.

AQUIB provides tailored training for experts, including students, adapting to individual needs, levels of knowledge, and specific functions within the evaluation process. This briefing helps panel members understand their roles and the procedures, ensuring a consistent approach to evaluations. It is based on a Power Point presentation that was made available to the review panel prior the on-site visit of AQUIB. Initially, panel experts are assigned specific criteria to assess. Each member, including the student, has access to only the criteria they are responsible for evaluating on the AVATIT platform. For example, the CET QA expert pre-evaluates criterion 3 related to quality assurance, while the student member evaluates criteria 1, 2, and 7. After the initial assessment, all criteria become available to all panel members for a comprehensive discussion, excluding the CET QA expert who is not part of the expert panel.

The CET QA expert, a professional in quality assurance, pre-evaluates criterion 3 by uploading comments and questions on the AVATIT platform. Although it is rare, this expert may participate in the on-site visit. Subsequently, the CET QA expert contributes to the final assessment report and the accreditation decision, providing recommendations for improvement.

## **Analysis**

AQUIB effectively engages external experts in all EQA activities, incorporating diverse perspectives from independent academics, students and QA experts in commissions and panels. The agency adheres to own selection criteria and guidelines, ensuring that experts are appropriately matched to their knowledge areas and the programs they evaluate. The process also emphasizes knowledge of the Spanish HE system, while measures are in place to prevent conflicts of interest, the first being that none of the experts come from the Balearic Islands.

Experts are selected through a rigorous process approved by the Criteria Commission, which ensures compatibility with the evaluation needs. Experts receive thorough training tailored to their individual needs, conducted face-to-face or online, and must read the guidelines and criteria before training. This personalized approach is highly valued by experts, who find the training efficient, useful, and fit for purpose.

The involvement of students as integral members of the panels is particularly noteworthy. Despite initial challenges in asserting themselves as equals to academic members, students feel empowered to

express their views freely. The agency's inclusive approach could be further exemplified by developing a collaboration with CREUP (Coordinadora de Representantes de Estudiantes de Universidades Públicas), which represents over a million students from 38 public universities. This partnership might aim at enhancing student expert training and further engagement.

The process of criteria assessment reveals some fragmentation among panel members and their different roles. Initially, panel members only have access to the assessment for criteria they are assigned to evaluate. Once their initial assessments are complete, all criteria are made available for group discussion. After the initial assessment, all criteria become available to all panel members for a comprehensive discussion to which the QA CET expert normally does not participate. This dual role of the CET QA expert in pre-evaluating criteria and participating in the final decision-making process could present potential conflicts of interest, even if all interviewed representatives did not perceive it as an issue or a risk. On the other side, involved stakeholders seem to appreciate a lot that the QA technical aspects are assessed by QA experts across all procedures. Nevertheless, the review panel believes that clear guidelines and transparent processes are needed to further ensure that the CET QA expert's contributions are unbiased and do not unfairly influence the final accreditation decisions.

While AQUIB states it as a goal in the Strategic Plan 2023-2025, there has not yet been an international member in an expert panel conducting a site visit. AQUIB might consider collaborating with other QA agencies to increase the involvement of Spanish speaking international experts in its activities. Also in case AQUIB would conduct more activities in the frame of the accreditation of arts study programmes, the presence of international experts in panels would represent an added value for programmes where the international dimension is particularly relevant.

Additionally, the review panel believes that the inclusion of experts from the labour market in panels could enhance the relevance of study programs by ensuring that they meet market needs and equip graduates with the necessary competences. Involving professionals from the labour market in expert panels for programme accreditation would provide valuable insights into the adequacy of study programs in preparing students for their future careers.

In conclusion, AQUIB's peer-review process is robust and inclusive, involving a diverse range of experts (always including a student member) and providing comprehensive training to ensure high-quality evaluations. However, addressing potential conflicts of interest, increasing the involvement of international experts, and integrating professionals from the labour market would further enhance the system. Collaboration with student organizations like CREUP could also improve the involvement and effectiveness of student experts, ensuring a more holistic and representative evaluation process.

### **Panel commendation**

C6. AQUIB is commended for the dedication of its staff in providing individualized, tailored-made training for experts.

### **Panel recommendation**

R6. AQUIB is recommended to ensure that any potential conflicts of interest, such as CET QA members participating in both the external evaluation for one criterion and in the decision-making process, are addressed in the Code of Ethics, in the briefing of the experts and in the guides for programme assessments.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

S8. The panel suggests AQUIB to collaborate with student organizations regarding the opportunity for a specific training for the student experts, enabling sharing of experiences from the student perspective.

S9. The panel suggests AQUIB to involve professionals from the labour market in expert panels for programme accreditation, who would provide valuable insights into the adequacy of study programs in preparing students for their future careers.

**Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

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

### Evidence

AQUIB has established a Criteria Commission that analyses, discusses and approves guidelines and criteria governing AQUIB's activities. The Criteria Commission's roles and responsibilities are clearly documented, and the appointment process for commission members is transparent and well-defined. The resolutions made by the Criteria Commission are recorded into the Commission's minutes and published<sup>13</sup>, providing transparency and accountability in the process.

The Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation (CET, including its two thematic sub-commissions), is responsible for overseeing and ensuring the consistent application of evaluation criteria. This commission plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and uniformity of the evaluation process. AQUIB has internal operating rules for the CET that outline the procedures and guidelines for conducting evaluations. These rules are publicly available and are designed to ensure consistency and fairness in all assessments. This helps ensure that all members are aware of their duties and the standards they must uphold.

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of AQUIB's external quality assurance are based on published criteria made explicit in Chapter 3 of the external evaluation guide for ex post accreditation of official university study programmes<sup>14</sup>. An achievement scale from A to D is used for semi-quantitative assessments of criteria, preparing for a final judgment (favourable or unfavourable). The guide explains how to apply it. The scale A-B-C relate to different levels of achievement of compliance, weather D is non-compliance, and it is also applied for the follow-up evaluation of official study programmes, as well as for the accreditation of art study programmes and for the DOCENTIA programme:

- A: Excellently achieved, when no deficiencies have been detected, the curriculum development excels in its field and relevant good practices are identified.
- B: Achieved, when the development of the curriculum is in accordance with the plan, without any deficiencies being detected in the development of the curriculum.
- C: Partially achieved, when deficiencies are detected in the development of the curriculum, but no serious breaches are detected in the commitments acquired in the last verified report. The deficiencies detected entail the requirement to implement improvement actions.
- D: Not achieved, when non-compliance with the commitments made in the last verified report is detected. For example, when the aspects indicated as requiring special attention in previous external assessment reports have not been addressed.

<sup>13</sup> Link to [Criteria Commission's Agreements](#).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.aquib.es/en/actividades/renovacion-acreditacion>.

During the meeting with members of the CET commission, the review panel could hear how CET members assure consistency across procedures. They made the following description of the process from first panel evaluation to publishing the CET report. Before the site visit, each panel member independently evaluates the programme and records findings on the AVATIT platform. After the visit, they provide an initial oral report to the programme representatives. The panel then finalizes their written report (called panel's evidence report – EV), which is sent to the CET. The CET compiles this report with their interim findings and sends it to the university for feedback. After considering the university's response, the CET issues a final report and decision, which is published.

To ensure consistency, the CET aligns the information and criteria used across different programmes, applying uniform standards. The published guide describes this as it follows: each programme is pre-assessed by an academic member of the corresponding CET's sub-commission. This person acts as rapporteur and reviews the dossier of the study programme to prepare a draft of the provisional ex post accreditation report (IPA) using the IT support platform for the assessment staff. The reviewer analyses it and provides his/her comments, which are reviewed by the rapporteur. The rapporteur presents the draft to the rest of the members of the sub-commission for discussion. Finally, as a result of this process, the CET issues the IPA. The IPA must be reasoned and consists of an introduction, an assessment of each of the seven criteria of the ex post accreditation model, which may include requirements, aspects that will receive special attention in future evaluations, suggestions for improvement and good practices, as well as their semi-quantitative assessment (A, B, C or D) and an overall assessment that may be: favourable; or with aspects that necessarily need to be modified in order to obtain a favourable report.

The IPA is sent to the university so that, within 20 working days, it can make the allegations it deems appropriate. Whenever the report contains "aspects that must necessarily be modified in order to obtain a favourable report", the university must attach an improvement plan that must conveniently detail the actions to be carried out and their timing. This plan will be subject to special follow-up by AQUIB. After receiving the allegations and/or the improvement plan presented by the university, AQUIB makes these documents available to the CET for analysis. The programme's rapporteur elaborates a final ex post accreditation report (IFA) draft, which is presented for discussion within the same sub-commission. In accordance with the results of the analysis, the CET issues the IFA.

The IFA contains an introduction, a qualitative assessment of each of the seven criteria of the ex post accreditation model, as well as the result of the evaluation, which can be favourable or unfavourable, following in principle the majority vote. The IFA may include requirements, aspects that will be the subject to special attention in future evaluations of the study programme, suggestions for improvement and also good practices. It also establishes the periodicity for the next external follow-up of the study programme by AQUIB. Once the CET issues the IFA, AQUIB forwards it to the Council of Universities, the university, the competent university authority, and the autonomous community.

The scale A to D is already provided to and used by experts panels prior and during the visit. The assessor must justify the semi-quantitative assessment given. He/she may also point out any confusing, insufficient, contradictory, non-existent or missing information or the need for additional information in relation to the evidence.

AQUIB's technical staff, particularly the secretaries who attend site visits, play a crucial role as well in ensuring that procedural requirements are consistently applied and that evaluation criteria are interpreted uniformly. Then, CET members are responsible for maintaining consistency in criteria application when issuing the final report and decision.

The internal quality assurance criterion is evaluated separately by a CET member, rather than by the evaluation panel. Based on the interviews on-site, the review panel learnt that this approach is standard practice across Spain. QA experts, who are from outside the Balearic Islands, contribute significant expertise in quality assurance, adding valuable insights. This method ensures that internal QA evaluations are thorough and consistent, providing an additional layer of scrutiny and expertise.

The criteria for outcomes for the follow-up of official university programmes are detailed in Chapter 3 of the dedicated External Evaluation Guide, outlining the specificities of this activity, the main one being that the assessment is, in this case, conducted entirely by the CET, sur dossier.

Clear guides are also published for the accreditation of art study programmes, explaining the criteria for outcomes and their assessment in the framework guide, articulated then in the external evaluation guide for ex post and follow-up assessments. This model is very similar if not identical to the ex post accreditation of official study programmes.

The DOCENTIA Programme Guide dedicates a chapter to the criteria for outcomes and their assessment, adding a specific annex (VII) called “Herramienta de evaluación para las Comisiones de Evaluación”. All is clear and explicit; thus, implementation cannot be assessed because of the absence of procedures conducted since the 2009 pilot.

## **Analysis**

Based on the documents analysed and the interviews conducted, the review panel found that the published criteria are applied consistently. Interviewees globally expressed positive views about the fairness and consistency of the assessments, with no objections nor complaints beyond the anticipated feedback from UIB during the draft report consultation phase. Feedback was also very positive about the work done by the Criteria Commission, establishing clear criteria, explicit and applicable in the assessments.

In conducting interviews on-site, the review panel could confirm that each panel member independently evaluates criteria making comments on the AVATIT platform before the visit. Thanks to the training and instruments received, experts find their task clear and can base their evaluation on explicit criteria. After the visit their evidence report (EV) is submitted to CET, which compiles the final report and makes the accreditation decision. The review panel could hear all involved stakeholders and confirms that CET ensures the harmonization of reports to maintain consistency in criteria application across all relevant programmes. Moreover, each panel is accompanied by a secretary from AQUIB who participates in visits to ensure procedural consistency, which proves efficient.

Overall, AQUIB's work on criteria for outcomes is considered rigorous. The panel believes the procedures for appointing and operating the committee are clear, and the committee members are competent in their roles. AQUIB demonstrates an impressive commitment to accountability in adhering to outcome-based criteria.

As previously mentioned, having a CET Commission member also serve on the Criteria Commission provides a valuable qualitative link between the development and application of criteria. This practice should be formalized and established as a standard rule (see panel's suggestion for further improvement under standard 2.2).

## **Panel commendation**

C7. AQUIB is commended for the CET's efficient role in ensuring the consistent application of criteria. Their diligent efforts in harmonizing the outcomes based on reports and maintaining procedural integrity significantly contribute to the reliability and fairness of the evaluation process.

## **Panel conclusion: compliant**

## ESG 2.6 REPORTING

### Standard:

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

### Evidence

AQUIB ensures transparency and accessibility in its reporting process. Published reports on the AQUIB website include a contextual description, an overview of the external review process, analyses and evidence of compliance with various criteria, aspects for future evaluations, identified good practices, and the assessment outcomes. From September 2023, the Evidence of Site Visit (EV) report – or panel's visit report – is annexed to CET's ex post provisional accreditation reports (IPA – see evidence under ESG 2.5) when sent to the university and published individually for all procedures since 2020. Ex post accreditation reports and follow-up reports produced since 2009 are all published. In addition (outside TOR), verification reports for ex ante accreditation produced since 2009 and modification reports produced since 2011 are also published.

In ex post accreditation procedures, the panel of experts and the CET intervene consecutively. Both the panel's visit report (EV) and the final CET report and decisions (IFA – see evidence under ESG 2.5) are published on the website. The separate report of the panel of experts is published under a different tab "visit" and is also accessible together with other reports on each specific programme/procedure. Typically, the panel visit report coincides, in terms of content, with the final report of the CET (IFA), which is a more summarized version and concludes with the decision. Until 2023, only the final CET report was published. But on this date, those reports that had been produced since 2020 were published. Unfavourable reports are published, though very few cases exist.

As for other AQUIB activities within the scope of the ESG, the publication of reports is done as follows:

- Follow-up of study programmes: Follow-up is conducted directly by the CET, and only its final report is published.
- DOCENTIA (carried out by ANECA): only one report from 2009 is available on the website, as only one pilot procedure took place.
- Ex ante accreditation of art study programmes (conducted by AQU Catalunya): only the CET report is published on a dedicated area of the website (only one ongoing procedure so far).
- Ex post accreditation of art study programmes: not yet implemented.
- Follow-up of art study programmes: not yet implemented.

The process of drafting and finalizing the report follows clear steps, according to the guide: the panel of experts drafts a consensual evaluation report for each assigned degree programme. CET analyses the panel's assessment, reflected in the EV, along with other documentation. CET then drafts the provisional IPA report, which is sent to the university for feedback. After reviewing the university's response, CET finalizes the report (IFA).

Despite being a clear and published procedure, the review panel noticed during the interviews that there is unclarity concerning the publication of reports, with different stakeholders holding varying stances and information. CET members and heads of accredited programmes generally believe only the final report is published, aligning with the panel report. However, when informed that EV reports are also published, some suggested to publish only the CET final report to avoid confusion. Reviewers draft reports based on criteria through the AVATIT platform but are unaware of CET changes and have varying understandings of report publication. Finally, the review panel heard the Technical

Director of AQUIB, who explained that the panel's EV visit report forms the basis of the CET's IPA provisional report, which usually reflects the panel's findings almost entirely. The HEI receives only the interim IPA report from the CET, with no traceability in the final IFA report for changes or comments. The quality and consistency of report content are ensured through the review and interaction of CET members and the use of the AVATIT platform where all findings of all steps of the assessment are uploaded, as well as previous reports of previous assessments.

### **Analysis**

Based on the presented evidence, the panel believes that reports follow established guides, templates, protocols, and criteria. The reports are structured with an introduction, objectives, description and analysis of activities, and sections covering organization, development, information, transparency, internal quality assurance systems, academic staff, support staff, material resources, learning outcomes, satisfaction, and performance indicators. Both the panel and CET reports follow this structure, with the CET report including final motivation and recommendations.

Until 2023, reports from the on-site visits of expert panels were only accessible to the CET for analysis. The CET prepared preliminary and final review reports based on these expert panel submissions, but the full content of the expert reports was not made publicly available. As a result, it was impossible to determine the extent to which the CET incorporated the key findings of the expert panels into their final reports. The lack of publication of these expert reports until 2023 made it difficult to distinguish the panels' specific assessments from the CET's judgments, as any modifications made by the CET were integrated into the text without indicating any differing views from the expert panels. These modifications could range from minor stylistic changes to significant substantive alterations (even if this is normally not the case, as it was confirmed during the on-site visit), but the final published report did not reveal the nature of these changes, leaving interested members of the public unable to discern them. Additionally, any changes made by the CET, whether minor or major, were not communicated to the panel members or the HEIs, who only received the interim report from the CET.

However, since 2023, both the reports from the on-site visits of the expert panels (EV) and the CET's final reports and decisions are published. The EV reports are made accessible retrospectively since 2020. This transparency resolves the previous issues, ensuring that the standard is now met. It is important to note that the varied awareness of this publication policy among different stakeholders is due to the recent implementation and the limited number of procedures affected so far. To ensure broad acceptance and a clear understanding of this change, it is crucial that all stakeholders are thoroughly informed and provided with a clear explanation of the new publication policy. In essence, the crux of the issue lies not in what gets published, which is in line with ESG 2.6, but rather in who is aware of it.

### **Panel recommendation**

R7. AQUIB is recommended to assure the transparency of roles and of substantial modifications from panel visit reports to CET final reports, if any.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

S10. The review panel suggests AQUIB to clearly inform all stakeholders on the new publication policy of external assessment reports and decisions.

### **Panel conclusion: compliant**



## ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:

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

### Evidence

According to the SAR, in February 2024, AQUIB outlined a comprehensive procedure for handling appeals and complaints arising from its activities in accordance with the ESG. It established the Guarantees Commission to oversee procedural integrity and handle appeals against its decisions. It is composed of three scientific, academic, and professional experts and one student. One AQUIB quality technician acts as the secretary, without voting rights.

According to the documentation provided, appeals against AQUIB's procedures can be submitted within specified timeframes, leading to administrative or legal recourse. Appeals against final decisions of other bodies are addressed by the respective administrative entity, which may seek AQUIB's input through the Guarantees Commission. No more information, explanations nor examples are given.

As for complaints, SAR mentions that the ISO 9001-certified Quality Management System addresses complaints via a dedicated form on its website or directly at its headquarters. Lacking implementation, it is unclear to determine who might deal with complaints, as opposed to other forms of expressing dissatisfaction.

An additional "claim" category is given: individuals or entities dissatisfied with evaluation processes where AQUIB is not the assessing body may file claims, which are reviewed by the Guarantees Commission, with AQUIB responding within two months. This concerns ex ante accreditation of art study programs and DOCENTIA, conducted in collaboration with ANECA and AQU Catalunya respectively. The review panel learnt during the on-site visit that complaints or appeals are to be directed to AQUIB, which then consults with AQU Catalunya or ANECA for clarifications, through the Guarantees Commission.

The review panel has cross-checked this SAR documentation with the information published on the website. In its English version<sup>15</sup>, AQUIB's webpage explains how to address suggestions, appeals and complaints with a dedicated form. Clicking on the form, the new page opening is named "Complaints, claims and appeals"; however, it is all grouped together and mentioned that also suggestions can be given. In Spanish, there is as well a unique form for "quejas, sugerencias, reclamaciones", without a clear definition of what is what.

During the site visit, the three representatives of the Guarantees Commission, including one student member, met by the panel confirmed that they all possess legal backgrounds. They are equipped with the necessary tools to handle appeals or claims should they arise. The commission indicated that the agency's website was last updated with the complaints and appeals procedure in February 2024, but they are unsure if corresponding guides have been similarly updated. They affirm to be familiar with the procedures for handling complaints and appeals, although these mechanisms were recently introduced, and no complaints or appeals have been received to date. The procedures and rules have been developed but have not yet been tested through practical experience. They anticipate a low volume of activity due to the agency's size and its single-university focus.

---

<sup>15</sup> Link to [Dedicated webpage on Suggestions, Appeals and Complaints](#).

University leaders confirm there has been little to no experience with appeals and complaints, although they acknowledge isolated instances in the past where disagreements over the CET's interim report led to complaints. In such cases, the university engaged with AQUIB to address concerns, which were subsequently reflected in the final CET report.

## **Analysis**

The Guarantees Commission, responsible for handling complaints and appeals, has been recently introduced, and thus far, there have been no actual complaints or appeals submitted. The members of the commission declare to be familiar with the procedures and rules, but they cannot report about practical experience due to the absence of cases. The review panel confirms their profiles and neutrality corresponds to the requirements for handling procedures without conflict of interests and with the necessary distance.

The agency's website provides explanations of the complaints and appeals procedures under the heading "Suggestions, appeals, and complaints". The panel has noted some confusion across different language versions of the site. For instance, in the Spanish and Catalan versions, the section is titled "Complaints and suggestions," but users can submit "complaints," "suggestions," or "reclamations." There are also discrepancies with the definitions used in the procedure for addressing appeals, to be found in the general description of AQUIB's website (appeals, complaints and claims). This inconsistency can be misleading and may hinder users from properly navigating the process. During the interviews, when asked about complaints, some interviewees answered talking about suggestions, indicating different levels of awareness on the wording and translations.

During meetings with UIB leaders, quality leaders, and deans, it was confirmed that there has been no experience of formal appeals or complaints. However, some deans mentioned occasional disagreements with interim reports from the CET, which were resolved through written allegations after having received the CET interim report and helped clarifying any issues. This is a recurrent procedural step that is not to be confused with formal complaints and appeals, although its proper and robust implementation normally reduces the probability of formal proceedings. The panel carefully discussed the issue and concluded that the differentiation required by the standard is procedurally well implemented and in place. Since there is no practical case, stakeholders might be unable to differentiate whether their issues are appropriately addressed in case different terminology is used. While the spirit of the standard is clearly met, some finetuning regarding consistency of wording could facilitate future situations.

The Guarantees Commission, which comprises three scientific, academic, and professional experts, one AQUIB quality technician, and one student, is seen as independent and competent. The commission members have been interviewed and are well-informed about their roles and responsibilities.

Concerning ex ante accreditation of art study programs and DOCENTIA, conducted in collaboration with ANECA and AQU Catalunya respectively, in view of intensifying these activities in the coming years, it is essential that complaints and appeals processes are clearly communicated, published and streamlined to avoid any possible confusion.

In conclusion, while AQUIB has established a structured procedure for handling complaints and appeals and has taken steps to ensure transparency and accountability, there are areas that would benefit from some additional attention. These include providing a more consistent and correct wording in website information and effectively communicating recent policy changes to all stakeholders, also in all instruments, templates, and guides. ESG guidelines may help in the correct use

of terms according to the type of claim, addressing the procedure, the conduct of the agency or the decision. As these processes have not been implemented yet, and are quite “fresh”, it is still possible to adjust wording to be even more fully in line with the ESG. By addressing these issues, AQUIB can improve its processes and maintain trust and confidence among the programmes it evaluates.

**Panel suggestions for further improvement**

S11. The review panel suggests AQUIB to clarify complaints and appeals procedures for EQA activities realized in the Balearic Islands in collaboration with ANECA and AQU Catalunya.

S12. The review panel suggests AQUIB to improve website information on complaints and appeals avoiding any possible misunderstanding.

**Panel conclusion: compliant**

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

In light of the external review, the review panel has particularly appreciated some aspects of AQUIB that it wishes to underline here as good practice:

- C1. AQUIB is commended for its clear and efficient process of designing annual work plans in collaboration with stakeholders, particularly in terms of scheduling. (ESG 3.1)
- C2. AQUIB is commended for its intense efforts over the past two years to strengthen stakeholder involvement in the Advisory Board, Criteria Commission, Guarantee Commission, and CET in alignment with the spirit of the ESG. (ESG 3.1)
- C3. AQUIB is commended for its positive work environment and collaborative culture among staff members, which are significant strengths contributing to the agency's effective operations. (ESG 3.5)
- C4. AQUIB is commended for the instrument of meta-evaluation, which stakeholders perceive as an important, structured, and efficient opportunity to provide open feedback and discuss improvement measures. (ESG 3.6)
- C5. AQUIB is commended for the professional conduct of its staff. The expertise and dedication of staff significantly contribute to the agency's effectiveness and the high regard in which it is held by the region it serves. (ESG 3.6)
- C6. AQUIB is commended for the dedication of its staff in providing individualized, tailored-made training for experts. (ESG 2.4)
- C7. AQUIB is commended for the CET's efficient role in ensuring the consistent application of criteria. Their diligent efforts in harmonizing the outcomes based on reports and maintaining procedural integrity significantly contribute to the reliability and fairness of the evaluation process. (ESG 2.5)

## OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, **AQUIB is in compliance with the ESG**. The review panel recommends the following, in view of the next cyclical external evaluation of the agency:

- R1. AQUIB is recommended to improve stakeholder involvement in the Board of Directors as foreseen in the new draft statutes. (ESG 3.1)
- R2. AQUIB is recommended to implement the composition of the Board of Directors with a balanced and broad representation as foreseen and intended by the new statutes, overcoming the limitation enforced by the law 7/2010, article 20.3. (ESG 3.3)
- R3. AQUIB is recommended to assure that the areas relevant under the scope of ESG are covered by thematic analysis on a regular basis, ideally in cooperation with UIB. (ESG 3.4)
- R4. AQUIB is recommended to put emphasis on how to implement areas such as innovation in teaching and learning, encouraging students to take an active role in their learning process and more involvement in the design of programmes. (ESG 2.1)
- R5. AQUIB is recommended to ensure that all stakeholders, including CET representatives, expert panel members and UIB representatives, are effectively informed about the entire external evaluation process. This includes their roles, the steps involved and how their contributions fit into the bigger picture. (ESG 2.3)
- R6. AQUIB is recommended to ensure that any potential conflicts of interest, such as CET QA members participating in both the external evaluation for one criterion and in the decision-

making process, are addressed in the Code of Ethics, in the briefing of the experts and in the guides for programme assessments. (ESG 2.4)

- R7. AQUIB is recommended to assure the transparency of roles and of substantial modifications from panel visit reports to CET final reports, if any. (ESG 2.6)

Particularly concerning standard 3.3, which is considered as partially fulfilled based on the degree of development of the legal framework witnessed until the on-site visit, the review panel has no doubt that the finalization of the legal steps for the adoption of the new Statutes will take place shortly after the external review will be concluded, allowing to incorporate possible suggestions having emerged from the review. Most importantly, the review panel wishes to underline the importance of the implementation of the new statutes in line with the ESG, once adopted. Meaning: the composition of the Board of Directors needs to comply with the balance criteria established in the new Statutes, regardless of the size of the agency in terms of number of employees.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

In addition to the mentioned recommendations, the review panel proposes to AQUIB to take into consideration the following suggestions for further improvement:

- S1. The review panel suggests AQUIB to intensify its efforts to increase the impact of involvement of the professional sector. (ESG 3.1)
- S2. The review panel suggests AQUIB to hire someone with a juridical background, in filling in next open positions. (ESG 3.5)
- S3. The review panel suggests AQUIB to consider developing quick news reaching targeted stakeholders with latest news or developments of the agency, in implementing the communication protocol. (ESG 3.6)
- S4. The review panel suggests AQUIB to re-evaluate methodologies by involving stakeholders and students, reducing bureaucracy, maximizing the quality of higher education provisions, and preparing for the upcoming developments. (ESG 2.2)
- S5. The review panel suggests AQUIB to consider institutionalising the currently implemented overlap in membership between CET and the Criteria Commission. (ESG 2.2)
- S6. The review panel suggests AQUIB to further clarify the role of the QA expert across all evaluations and ensure all stakeholders are aware of their involvement, whether they participate in on-site visits, provide questions for the panel or are responsible for evaluating a specific criterion from A to Z. (ESG 2.3)
- S7. The review panel suggests AQUIB to better outline in its guides what is the procedure for how and when interim/final reports are sent to HEIs and how exactly CET decisions are made and communicated in the reports. (ESG 2.3)
- S8. The panel suggests AQUIB to collaborate with student organizations regarding the opportunity for a specific training for the student experts, enabling sharing of experiences from the student perspective. (ESG 2.4)
- S9. The panel suggests AQUIB to involve professionals from the labour market in expert panels for programme accreditation, who would provide valuable insights into the adequacy of study programs in preparing students for their future careers. (ESG 2.4)
- S10. The review panel suggests AQUIB to clearly inform all stakeholders on the new publication policy of external assessment reports and decisions. (ESG 2.6)
- S11. The review panel suggests AQUIB to clarify complaints and appeals procedures for EQA activities realized in the Balearic Islands in collaboration with ANECA and AQU Catalunya. (ESG 2.7)

- S12. The review panel suggests AQUIB to improve website information on complaints and appeals avoiding any possible misunderstanding. (ESG 2.7)

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX I: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

| SESSION NO.   | TIMING          | TOPIC  |
|---|-----------------|--|
| <b>15.05.2024 at 10.30-12.00</b> Online meeting with the agency's resource person |                 |  |
| 1   | 90 min          | Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for site visit<br><b>Part I on 7 May at 12.00-13.00 (60 min.)</b><br><b>Part II on 15 May at 12.00-12.30 (30 min.)</b>  |
| 2   | 90 min          | An online clarifications meeting with the agency's resource person regarding the specific national/legal context in which an agency operates, specific quality assurance system to which it belongs and key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities |
| <b>28.05.2024 – Day 0 (pre-visit)</b>   |                 |  |
| 3   | 90 min<br>18h00 | Pre-visit meeting and preparations for day I followed by   |
|   | 20h00           | Review panel's Dinner  |

| <b>29.05.2024 – Day I</b> |                           |  |   |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
|                           | 30 min                    | Review panel's private meeting   |   |
| 5                         | 45 + 30 min<br>9.00-09.45 | Meeting with the President, the Technical Director and 2 representatives from the Board of Directors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- President of AQUIB. General Director of Universities in the Government of the Balearis Islands.</li> <li>- Member of the Board of Directors.</li> <li>- Member of the Board of Directors.</li> <li>- Technical Director of AQUIB.</li> </ul> |
|                           | 09.45-10.15               | Directly followed by a meeting with the Technical Director alone                                     |   |
|                           | 15 min                    | Review panel's private discussion  |   |

|   |                       |   |  |
|---|-----------------------|---|--|
| 6 | 45 min<br>10.30-11.15 | Meeting with a representation of the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report ( <i>Groups 1-2-3 according to SAR</i> )                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- AQUIB technician. Group 1.</li> <li>- AQUIB technician. Group 1.</li> <li>- Group 2. President of the Advisory Commission.</li> <li>- Group 2. Criteria Commission member.</li> <li>- Group 3. Member of the Board of Directors.</li> </ul>   |
|   | 30 min                | Review panel's private discussion & break   |  |
| 7 | 45 min<br>11.45-12.30 | Meeting with department/key body of the agency 1 ( <i>a representation of the Advisory Commission</i> )   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- President. Professor of Business Organization (Universitat de Girona).</li> <li>- Professor of Applied Mathematics (Universitat de les Illes Balears).</li> <li>- External quality management professional.</li> <li>- Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (Universidad de La Laguna).</li> </ul>   |
|   | 75 min                | Lunch (panel only)  |  |
| 8 | 60 min<br>13.45-14.45 | Meeting with department/key body of the agency 2<br>( <i>Guarantees Commission – complaints and appeals – and Criteria Commission – adoption of criteria and guidelines –</i> ) | <p><b><u>Guarantees Commission</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- President. Professor of Administrative Law (Universidade de Vigo).</li> <li>- Company Counsel en Elsevier Ltd (Oxford).</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Criteria Commission</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- President of Criteria Commission. Professor of Applied Economics (Universitat de Barcelona).</li> <li>- Member. Responsible of internationalisation (UNIBASQ).</li> <li>- Member of Criteria Commission. Professor of Mathematics (Universidad de Cantabria).</li> </ul>  |
|   | 15 min                | Review panel's private discussion   |  |
| 9 | 60 min<br>15.00-16.00 | Meeting with key staff of the agency/staff in charge of external QA activities 1 ( <i>CET: Commission of study programme evaluation: 2 sub-commissions</i> )                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- President of sub-commission of Arts and Humanities, Social and Legal Sciences. Emeritus Professor of Spanish Literature (Universidad de Sevilla).</li> <li>- President of sub-commission of Sciences, Health Sciences and Engineering and Architecture (Universidad de Castilla la Mancha).</li> <li>- Quality department (Universitat de València).</li> <li>- Honorary Emeritus Professor of Research and diagnosis Methods in Education (Universidad de Murcia).</li> <li>- Professor of applied physics (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya).</li> <li>- Balearic Islands College of Chemists.</li> </ul> |
|   | 20 min                | Review panel moves to AQUIB premises  |  |



|                           |                       |  |  |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| 10<br>AQUIB               | 60 min<br>16.20-17.20 | Meeting with key staff of the agency/staff in charge of external QA activities I ( <i>Agency Staff for activities within the scope of the ESG, including the new internationalisation technician</i> ) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technician. Internationalisation.</li> <li>- Office manager.</li> <li>- Technician. Individual staff accreditation, complementary payments and R+D+I.</li> <li>- Technician. Study programme evaluation.</li> <li>- Technician. Study programme evaluation.</li> </ul>  |
|                           | 10 min                | Review panel's break   |  |
| 11<br>AQUIB               | 60 min<br>17.30-18.30 | Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day 2   |  |
|                           |                       | Dinner (panel only)  |  |
| <b>30.05.2024 – Day 2</b> |                       |  |  |
|                           | 30 min                | Review panel's private meeting   |  |
| 12                        | 45 min<br>9.00-9.45   | Meeting with regional Government representatives   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regional Minister of Education and Universities in the Government of the Balearis Islands.</li> <li>- General Director of Universities in the Government of the Balearis Islands.</li> <li>- General Direction of Universities. Head of Department in the Government of the Balearis Islands.</li> </ul>                    |
|                           | 15 min                | Review panel's private discussion  |  |
| 13                        | 60 min<br>10.00-11.00 | Meeting with head of UIB, its quality leaders and a couple of Deans of faculties   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rector of UIB.</li> <li>- Head of UIB's Postgraduate Study Management Unit.</li> <li>- Head of UIB's Bachelor Studies Management Unit.</li> <li>- Dean of the Faculty of Nursing and Physiotherapy.</li> <li>- Director of UIB's Centre for Postgraduate Studies.</li> <li>- Ex-Dean of the Faculty of Medicine.</li> </ul> |
|                           | 30 min                | Review panel's private discussion & break  |  |
| 14                        | 60 min<br>11.30-12.30 | Meeting with heads of accredited programmes (a mix of responsables for individual programs, QA technicians and a couple of students such as class representatives)                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coordinator of the PhD in Philology and Philosophy. UIB.</li> <li>- Head of the Degree in Nursing. UIB.</li> <li>- Director of the Master's Degree in Biomedical Research. UIB.</li> <li>- QA Technician. UIB.</li> <li>- QA Technician. UIB.</li> <li>- President of the Student's Council. UIB.</li> </ul>                |

|              |                       |   |  |
|--------------|-----------------------|---|--|
|              |                       |   | - Vice President of Medical Students' Delegation and class delegate (4 <sup>th</sup> year).-UIB. Could not attend due to illness and was replaced by a Member of the Medical Students' Delegation.   |
|              | 75 min                | Lunch (panel only)  |  |
| 15<br>ONLINE | 60 min<br>13.45-14.45 | Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool including a couple of students  | - Full professor (Universitat de València).<br>- Professor of electronic technology (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid).<br>- Professor of animal ecology and biology (Universidade de Vigo).<br>- Professor of theoretical and cosmos physis (Universidad de Granada).<br>- Master's student of Quality Assessment and Certification Processes in Higher Education (Universidad Internacional de La Rioja).<br>- PhD student (Universidad de Zaragoza). |
|              | 15 min                | Review panel's private discussion   |  |
| 16           | 60 min<br>15.00-16.00 | Meeting with students ( <i>involved in IQA at UIB-level or faculty-level or in single programmes; involved as experts in the review-teams for EQA</i> ) | - Ex-student member of the CET.<br>- Student member of the Guarantees Commission.<br>- Student member of the Advisory Commission.<br>- <del>UIB's IQA commission of the PhD in Philology and Philosophy. Could not attend due to illness and could not be replaced</del><br>- UIB's IQA commission of the Master's Degree in General Health Psychology.<br>- UIB's IQA commission of the Degree in Hotel Management                                      |
|              | 15 min                | Review panel's private discussion   |  |
| 17           | 45 min<br>16.15-17.00 | Meeting with stakeholders I<br>professional associations, student associations, REACU, other relevant   | - Member of the Balearic Islands Professional Association of Psychologists.<br>- President of the Coordination of Student Representatives of Public Universities (CREUP).<br>- President of the Health Sciences Student Association (AECS).<br>- Director of AQU Catalunya (member of REACU).<br>- Staff of the General Direction of Health Research, Training and Accreditation in the Government of the Balearis Islands.                              |
| 18<br>ONLINE | 30 min<br>17.00-17.30 | Meeting with stakeholders II<br><br>AQU Catalunya (related with art study programmes), ANECA (related and Docentia)                                     | - Senior Advisor (AQU Catalunya).<br>- Manager of the Degrees and Institutional Assessment Division (ANECA).   |
|              | 15 min                | Review panel's break  |  |

|                           |                       |   |  |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---|--|
| 19                        | 60 min<br>17.45-18.45 | Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day 3 (agree on final issues to clarify and confirm if session 20 takes place) and provisional conclusions |  |
| <b>31.05.2024 – Day 3</b> |                       |   |  |
| 20<br>AQUIB               | 30 min<br>8.15-8.45   | Short visit of AQUIB premises / coffee with the staff   |  |
| 21<br>AQUIB               | 45 min<br>8.45-9.30   | Meeting with the Technical Director to clarify any pending issues ( <i>location: in her office</i> )  | - Technical Director   |
|                           | 15 min                | Review panel's moves back to the meeting room   |  |
| 22                        | 120 min<br>9.45.11.45 | Private meeting between panel members to agree on the main findings   |  |
|                           | 60 min                | Business Lunch in the meeting room (panel only)   |  |
|                           | 15 min                | Break / Debriefing participants join the room   |  |
| 23                        | 30 min<br>13.00-13.30 | Final debriefing meeting with staff and Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings  | - President of AQUIB.<br>- Board member.<br>- Technical Director.<br>- 4 QA technicians. |

## ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

### External review of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQUIB) by ENQA

#### Annex I:

#### TRIPARTITE TERMS OF REFERENCE BETWEEN AQUIB, ENQA AND EQAR

September 2023

##### I. Background and context

The Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQUIB) was formed as a consortium in 2002 by the Board of Directors, which adopted its first statutes. The Agency was recognized as an official body by the Autonomic Law 2/2003, of 20<sup>th</sup> of March, on institutional organisation of the Balearic Islands university system. According to autonomic and national laws, AQUIB is the competent official body for assuring the quality of the higher education system of the Balearic Islands. Its main aim is to proactively strengthen the quality of the higher education and research system of its Autonomous Community through assessment, certification and accreditation in the field of teaching, research, management and knowledge transfer, acting in line with international quality standards.

To effectively achieve this goal, AQUIB performs a variety of activities at different levels, which are subject to the Agency's core values including independence, transparency, integrity and social responsibility. Therefore, each evaluation commission and individual expert decides on an independent basis, without any external pressure.

In relation to AQUIB's activities, these are divided into three main areas:

##### - **External quality assurance:**

- Accreditation renewal (ex post accreditation) and follow-up of study programmes of the Balearic Islands. Their main goal is to monitor whether the study continues to implement the programme as in its first accreditation and continues to cover its learning outcomes.
- AQUIB also implements these actions in art study programmes, which work along the same lines. The ex ante accreditation (verification) of art study programmes is performed by AQU Catalunya and coordinated by AQUIB as established in an agreement between both agencies.
- DOCENTIA, which focuses on the institutional assessment of the university's own mechanism to ensure the quality of their teaching staff. This activity is performed by ANECA and coordinated by AQUIB as established in an agreement between both agencies.
- Finally, if accepted as member of ENQA and registered in EQAR, AQUIB will be able to conduct ex ante accreditations (verification) and modifications of study programmes in the Balearic Islands. Thus, AQUIB could potentially be the responsible body of the full accreditation cycle in the Balearic Islands. It must be noted that no work has been conducted to develop this activity yet.

##### - **Individual accreditation of teaching staff and researchers:**

- Evaluation and accreditation of the teaching figures established by Law. The Agency does not hire nor give funds to teaching staff. Notwithstanding this, it must be noted that AQUIB issues individual accreditation to each candidate. This accreditation is required in the recruitment calls of the University of the Balearic Islands. However, due to recent law changes in Spain, this activity has been currently paralysed. Specifically, the Organic Law 2/2023, of the University System, only enables agencies registered in EQAR for accrediting of teaching figures. Hence, this process has not been implemented in 2023.
- Assessment of applications from the teaching staff of the University eligible to receive three complementary payments established by Decree 7/2017, of 10<sup>th</sup> of February. Again, AQUIB

only certifies the eligibility of the applicants to receive or not this complement and does not give any funds to the applicants.

- **R+D+I assessments:**

- AQUIB assesses research projects and grant applications for different stakeholders who request this service in their calls.

AQUIB is active at a national level, collaborating with other Spanish agencies through the Spanish Quality Agencies Network (REACU). In addition, as adopted in a three-year strategic plan, the Agency intends to conduct an international evaluation programme. This programme will be implemented after successful application for full membership of ENQA and registration in EQAR.

AQUIB has been an affiliate of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since March 2008 and is applying for ENQA membership.

AQUIB is applying for inclusion on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

## **2. Purpose and scope of the review**

This review will evaluate the extent to which AQUIB (the agency) complies with each of the standards of Parts 2 and 3 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* and support the agency in its efforts to continually review and enhance its work. Such an external review is a requirement for agencies wishing to apply for ENQA membership and/or for EQAR registration.

### **2.1 Activities of the agency within the scope of the ESG**

To apply for ENQA membership and EQAR registration, this review will analyse all the agency's activities that fall within the scope of the ESG, e.g., reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditations of HEIs or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). All activities are reviewed irrespective of geographic scope (within or outside the EHEA) or whether they are obligatory or voluntary in nature.

The following activities of the agency must be addressed in the external review:

- Ex post accreditation of study programmes
- Follow-up of study programmes
- Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions' teaching quality assessment systems (DOCENTIA): this activity is coordinated by AQUIB but performed by ANECA.
- Ex ante accreditation (verification) of art study programmes: this activity is coordinated by AQUIB but performed by AQU Catalunya.
- Ex post accreditation of art study programmes: this activity is currently in the preliminary phase, since the protocol has been defined but not implemented.
- Follow-up of art study programmes: this activity is currently in the preliminary phase, since the protocol has been defined but not implemented.

While some activities, i.e., ex post accreditation of art study programmes and follow-up of art study programmes, are not yet carried out, the activities should nevertheless be covered and assessed in the self-evaluation report and the external review report based on available processes and documentation.

Should any substantive changes occur in AQUIB between now and the review (e.g., organisational changes, the introduction or changes of activities within or outside of the scope of the ESG), the agency should inform EQAR at its earliest convenience.

### **3. The review process**

The review will be conducted following the methodology of ENQA Agency Reviews. The process is designed in line with the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The review procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of, and agreement on the Terms of Reference for the review between AQUIB, ENQA and EQAR (including publishing of the Terms of Reference on ENQA's website<sup>16</sup>);
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by ENQA;
- Notification of EQAR about the appointed panel;
- Self-assessment by the agency, including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit of the agency by the review panel;
- Preparation and completion of the final review report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final review report by ENQA's Agency Review Committee;
- Publication of the final review report;
- A decision from the EQAR Register Committee on the agency's registration on EQAR;
- A decision from the ENQA Board on ENQA membership;
- Follow-up on the panel's recommendations to the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

#### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review panel**

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts (at least one of which is currently employed by an ENQA member agency), an academic employed by a HEI, a student member, and potentially a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members serves as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency. In this case, an additional fee is charged to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Review Coordinator (an ENQA staff member) who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements are met throughout the process. The Review Coordinator will not be the secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide the agency with the proposed panel composition and the curricula vitarum of the panel members to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The reviewers will have to agree to a non-conflict of interest statement that is incorporated in their contract for the review of this agency.

---

<sup>16</sup> The agency is encouraged to publish the ToR on its website as well.

### **3.2 Self-assessment by the agency, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

The agency is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and must adhere to the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is expected to contain:
  - a brief description of the HE and QA system;
  - the history, profile, and activities of the agency;
  - a presentation of how the agency addresses each individual standard of Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG for each of the agency's external QA activities, with a brief, critical reflection on the presented facts;
  - opinions of stakeholders;
  - the instances of partial compliance noted in the most recent EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal and any other aspects that may have been raised by the EQAR Register Committee in subsequent change report decisions (if relevant);
  - reference to the recommendations provided in the previous review and actions taken to meet those recommendations;
  - a SWOT analysis;
  - reflections on the agency's key challenges and areas for future development.
- All the agency's external QA activities (as defined under section 2.1) are described and their compliance with the ESG is analysed in the SAR.
- The report is well-structured, concise, and comprehensive. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which the agency performs its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG.

The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat, which has two weeks to carry out a screening. The purpose of a screening is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but rather whether or not the necessary information, as outlined in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*, is present. If the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to ask for a revised version within two weeks

The final version of the agency's self-assessment report is then submitted to the review panel a minimum of eight weeks prior to the site visit. The agency publishes the completed SAR on its website and sends the link to ENQA. ENQA will publish this link on its website as well.

### **3.3 A site visit by the review panel**

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which must be submitted to the agency at least six weeks before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule is to include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is usually 2,5 days. The approved schedule must be given to the agency at least one month before the site visit to properly organise the requested interviews.

In advance of the site visit (ideally at least two weeks before the site visit), the panel will organise an obligatory online meeting with the agency. This meeting is held to ensure that the panel reaches a sufficient understanding of:

- The specific national/legal context in which the agency operates;
- The specific quality assurance system to which the agency belongs;

- The key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities.

The review panel will be assisted by the ENQA Review Coordinator during the site visit. The review coordinator will act as the panel's chief liaison with the agency, monitor the integrity of the review process and its consistency, and ensure that ENQA's overall expectations of the review are considered and met.

The site visit will close with a final debriefing meeting in which the panel outlines its general impressions and provides an overview of the judgement on the agency's ESG compliance. The panel will not comment on whether or not the agency would be granted/reconfirmed membership with ENQA or registration on EQAR.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final review report**

Based on the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will follow the purpose and scope of the review as defined under sections 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for the panel's findings concerning each standard of Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind *EQAR's Policy on Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies*<sup>17</sup> to ensure that the report contains sufficient information for the Register Committee to consider the agency's application for registration on EQAR

A draft will first be submitted to the ENQA Review Coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity, and language, and it will then be submitted to the agency – usually within 10 weeks of the site visit – for comment on factual accuracy and grave misunderstandings only. The agency will be given two weeks to do this and should not submit any additional material or documentation at this stage. Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the agency's feedback on possible factual errors and finalise and submit the review report to ENQA.

The report should be finalised within three months of the site visit and will normally not exceed 40-50 pages in length.

### **3.5. Publication of the report and a follow-up process**

The agency will receive the review panel's report and publish it on its website once the Agency Review Committee has validated the report. The report will also be published on the ENQA website together with the statement of the Agency Review Committee validating external review reports by assessing the integrity of the review process and checking the quality and consistency of the reports. Importantly, during this process, and prior to final validation of the report, the Agency Review Committee has the option to request additional (documentary) evidence or clarification from the review panel, review coordinator or the agency if needed. The review report will be published on ENQA website regardless of the review outcome.

As part of the review's follow-up activities, the agency commits to react on the review recommendations and submit a follow-up report to ENQA within two years of the validation of the final external review report. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website.

The follow-up report may be complemented by an optional progress visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). The visit, which normally takes place 2-3 years after the verification of the final external review report (and after submission of the follow-up report), aims to offer an enhancement-oriented and strategically driven dialogue that ordinarily might be

---

<sup>17</sup> Available at: <https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>.



difficult to truly integrate in the compliance-focused site visit. The progress visit thus does not have the objective of checking the agency’s ESG compliance or how the agency has followed up on the recommendations, but rather provides an arena for strategic conversations that allow the agency to reflect on its key challenges, opportunities, and priorities. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

#### 4. Use of the report

ENQA will retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the review panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, will be vested in ENQA.

The report is used as a basis for the Register Committee’s decision on the agency’s registration on EQAR. In the case of an unsuccessful application to EQAR, the report may also be used by the ENQA Board to reach a conclusion on whether the agency can be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The review process is thus designed to serve two purposes. In any case, the review report should only be considered final after validation by the Agency Review Committee. After submission to ENQA but before validation by the ARC, the report may not be used or relied upon by the agency, the panel, or any third party and may not be disclosed without ENQA’s prior written consent. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on EQAR registration or ENQA membership.

For the purposes of EQAR registration, the agency will submit the review report (once validated by the Agency Review Committee) to EQAR via email. The agency should also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF format), a Declaration of Honour, and any other documents that may be relevant for the application (i.e., annexes, statement to the review report, updates). EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency’s application at its Register Committee meeting as stipulated in the indicative review schedule below and before the decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board.

To apply for ENQA membership, the agency is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which the agency expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be considered by the Board together with the confirmation of EQAR listing when deciding on the agency’s membership. Should the agency not be granted the registration in EQAR or the registration is not renewed, the decision on ENQA membership will be taken based on the final review report, the application letter, and the statement from the Agency Review Committee. The decision on membership will be published on ENQA’s website.

#### 5. Indicative schedule of the review

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| Agreement on Terms of Reference   | December 2023 |
| Appointment of review panel members   | February 2024 |
| Self-assessment completed   | 1 March 2024  |
| Screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator   | March 2024    |
| Preparation of the site visit schedule and indicative timetable   | May 2024      |
| Briefing of review panel members  | May 2024      |
| Review panel site visit   | June 2024     |
| Draft of review report and its submission to ENQA Review Coordinator for verification of its compliance with the Guidelines | July 2024     |

|   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Draft of review report to be sent for a factual check to the agency     | August 2024                 |
| Agency statement on the draft report to the review panel (if necessary) | August 2024                 |
| Submission of the final report to ENQA                                  | September 2024              |
| Validation of the review report by the Agency Review Committee          | Late September/October 2024 |
| Publication of report   | October 2024                |
| EQAR Register Committee meeting and initial consideration               | December 2024               |
| Decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board                           | Early 2025                  |

### ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| CAIB  | Government of the Balearic Islands   |
| CET   | Commission of Study Programmes Evaluation  |
| CREUP | Coordinadora de Representantes de Estudiantes de Universidades Públicas                            |
| EQA   | external quality assurance   |
| ENQA  | European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education                                     |
| ERR   | external review report   |
| ESG   | Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area               |
| EV    | Evidence of site visit collected by the experts' panel   |
| HE    | higher education   |
| HEI   | higher education institution   |
| IQA   | internal quality assurance   |
| IFA   | Final report on ex post accreditation (Informe Final de Renovación de la Acreditación)             |
| IPA   | Provisional report on ex post accreditation (Informe Provisional de Renovación de la Acreditación) |
| UIB   | University of the Balearic Islands   |
| QA    | quality assurance  |
| SAR   | self-assessment report   |

## ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

### DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AQUIB

- AQUIB's self-assessment report
- Translation in English of key sections of AQUIB's Statutes 2005 and 2024
- AQUIB's procedural guides
- AQUIB's briefing package for expert panels
- Extracts of minutes of different commissions' meetings
- AQUIB's template report for the self-assessment of Bachelor and Master study programmes
- Procedure for complaint and appeals translated in English

### OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

- AQUIB's website: <https://www.aquib.es/en>

## ENQA AGENCY REVIEW 2024

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Balearic Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AQUIB), undertaken in 2024.

**enqa.**

European Association for  
Quality Assurance in Higher Education