EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Accreditation self-assessment report
2016 · November

The context: the EHEA
The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) comprises all of the countries that agreed to participate in the Bologna Process, which is almost all of the countries in Europe.

Since 2010, higher education qualifications in these countries (bachelor’s degrees, university master’s degrees and doctorates) have had to be adapted to the requirements established in the agreement.

The aim is to harmonize—but not homogenize—all bachelor’s degrees and master’s degrees in Europe, so that a graduate from one country can work in another, or a student who has obtained a bachelor’s degree in one country can study for a master’s degree in another.

Quality in higher education
The VSMA Framework was created to ensure quality in higher education. It is composed of four processes that can be used to oversee all official qualifications:

- Validation (ex-ante assessment)
- Monitoring
- Modification
- Accreditation

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU), which oversees the quality of higher education in Catalonia, uses the following mechanisms to supervise a qualification:

1. Validation report for the qualification: this must be approved by AQU a priori. A degree cannot be taught unless it has successfully passed this initial stage. All of the related official documents can be accessed on the faculty webpage.
2. Annual monitoring reports, written at the end of the academic year by the Faculty itself and made public, and the accreditation process that is undertaken by AQU.
In all of these processes, academic aspects are assessed as well as graduates’ employability and integration into employment.

**Accreditation**

Accreditation methodology has been used for many years in English-speaking countries to assess the results of organizations in the public and semipublic sector, and ensure their responsibility and transparency. Organizations should not be passive agents in the assessment process. Instead, they must be involved in analysing their activities and results, and take responsibility for improving.

There are two essential steps in any accreditation process:
- **Compilation of a self-assessment report** by the organization that is seeking accreditation.
- **Site visit by a panel of independent experts**.

**Accreditation of qualifications**

Once a degree course has been running for a certain length of time and results are available on academic achievement, employability and integration into employment, the accreditation process can continue. Accreditation must be renewed periodically:
- bachelor’s degrees and doctorates: every 6 years,
- master’s degrees: every 4 years.

One essential condition for accreditation is that at least one group of students has graduated, given that some of the academic indicators (as well as employability and integration into employment) can only be assessed once students have completed the course.

The eight official master’s degrees that are being accredited at the Faculty of Economics and Business (November 2016) took new intakes in the academic year 2013-2014:

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Degrees that are being accredited in the current process (2016 · November)</th>
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<tr>
<td>o Master in Economics</td>
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<td>o Master in Economic History</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Master in Sociology: Social Transformations and Innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Master in Creation and Management of Innovative Technology-Based Companies</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Master in Sport Business Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Master in Economics, Regulation and Competition in Public Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Master in Cultural Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Master in Internationalization: Economic, Commercial, Legal and Political and Aspects</td>
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Each of the degree courses will be assessed individually, and classified as:

- Accredited with excellence
- Accredited
✓ Accredited with conditions (shortfalls that are identified do not interfere with the running of the degree, but must be resolved in a two-year period under the supervision of AQU)
✓ Accreditation withheld

In the first three cases, the classification can be made public via quality labels provided by AQU.

By contrast, when the result of the accreditation process is unfavourable, the degree cannot be offered to new students and will gradually be withdrawn.

Stages of accreditation
The Faculty is involved in two stages of the accreditation process:
1. Preparation of the self-assessment report and associated evidence. This was started in early 2016 and delivered to AQU on 4 July 2016.
2. Site visit by the External Review Panel (CAE), on 2, 3 and 4 November 2016. On the last day of the visit, in its last session, the CAE will provide preliminary results for each one of the master’s degrees that has been assessed.

The final accreditation reports will be issued by AQU, after a consultation stage and several months after the site visit. In total, the process will have taken over a year.

The Faculty has already been involved in an initial accreditation process, in which four bachelor’s degrees and three official master’s degrees were successfully accredited. This process culminated with a site visit on 25 and 26 February 2016.

AQU accreditation guide
AQU is responsible for the entire accreditation process of Catalan universities, and for establishing and ensuring compliance with regulations based on state legislation. All of the guidelines are included in the latest version of the AQU Guide to the Accreditation of Recognised Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree Programmes, which can be freely accessed online.

The guidelines include the required structure of the self-assessment report, the standards or dimensions of quality that will be assessed, and the assessment rubrics.
The self-assessment report

Aim of the self-assessment report

This document is designed to analyse the degrees that are being accredited. It covers the period from the establishment of the current training programme for each master’s degree, that is, academic years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015.

Briefly, the elements that are analysed are:

1. The suitability of the initial programme, as summarized in the ex-ante report on the degree.
2. How successful the implementation of the training programme has been, at operational and academic levels.
3. The final results obtained by students, including their academic achievements, employability and integration into employment.

Essential elements for the continuous improvement of quality are: an analysis of indicators of the results, and self-criticism, which contributes to the creation of an improvement plan in accordance with the previous conclusions. This should be the focus of the self-report.

Preparation of the self-assessment report

The Internal Review Panel (CAI) is responsible for drawing up the self-assessment report. This Panel is created for the purpose of accreditation and is comprised of individuals from different areas of the Faculty who are involved in degree quality: from the Dean to a student representative, and including all of the academic heads.

The report is available to the entire UB community on the Faculty website: self-assessment report.

Structure of the self-report

The structure of the self-assessment report is determined by the guidelines in the AQU Guide to the Accreditation of Recognised Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree Programmes.

Chapter C, the main chapter for the self-assessment report, is arranged in six dimensions or standards (from 1 to 6), each of which is divided into sub-standards. The 6 standards established by AQU are:

- Standard 1. Quality of the training programme
- Standard 2. Relevance of the public information
- Standard 3. Effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system for the degree
- Standard 4. Suitability of teaching staff for the training programme
- Standard 5. Effectiveness of the learning support systems
- Standard 6. Quality of the results of the training programmes

For every degree, all six dimensions are assessed independently and given a level: attained with quality, attained, attained with conditions, not attained. The results for the six standards count towards the overall assessment of the degree.
However, the dimensions do not have the same weight in the overall assessment. For example, AQU establishes in the Guide that *a degree will not be accredited if the assessment of dimensions 4, 5 or 6 is “Not attained”.*

Chapter D is also crucial, although it does not receive an assessment per se. It includes *monitoring of improvements on previous years and the proposed plan of improvements* to address any shortfalls that have been identified.

**Evidence**

All of the information in the self-assessment report is based on a wide range of supporting *evidence*. Therefore, *the discourse of the document is illustrative rather than theoretical; it should be objective rather than subjective.*

The *evidence* could include information that already exists on the University or Faculty websites (links can be provided in the document), or documents created specifically and deposited in the specific *Virtual Campus area for the current accreditation process*.

**Analysis of selected subjects**

The quality of training programmes must be assessed (Standard 6). To achieve this, *a sample of subjects is selected* by the Faculty. *Only two subjects are examined in-depth for each master’s degree*, along with the final project and external placements (if these are compulsory). In this assessment, representative samples of all the tests and assignments used in the *selected subjects* are presented. These pieces of evidence are called *executions*.

The aim of this analysis is to verify whether the *training activities* and the *assessment systems* are appropriate, and coincide with those proposed in the ex-ante report.

**Site visit by the CAE**

The Faculty visit organised by AQU is carried out by an independent External Review Panel (CAE) comprised of various experts (academics, one of whom will act as the chairperson), a professional member (with experience in the field of the degrees that are being accredited), a student member (who is studying in the same field), and an AQU expert in accreditation methodology (who acts as the secretary).

In addition to an interview with the directors of the degree and representatives of the CAI, the CAE will interview the following groups:

- master’s degree coordinators,
- teaching staff,
- students,
- master’s degree graduates,
- employers.

Given the number of degrees that need to be assessed, the visit will take place over three days, on *2, 3 and 4 November. Every day, 2 or 3 master’s degrees will be evaluated together.*

*The aim of the site visit is to expand on the information* presented in the self-assessment report and the evidence, and clarify any concerns of the CAE. The self-assessment report, evidence and
the opinions of the interest groups are the instruments that the CAE will use to assess the degrees.

**For more information...**

*Guide to the accreditation of recognised bachelor’s degree and master’s degree programmes*: this Executive Summary provides an overview of the process. To learn more, see the Guide and the references therein.

*2016 accreditations at the Faculty*: full information on the accreditation processes that have taken place at the Faculty of Economics and Business.

*FEE website*: information on the degrees offered at the Faculty of Economics and Business.

*FEE webpage on quality*: information about accreditation and the VSMA Framework on the website of the Quality Unit of the Faculty of Economics and Business.

*APQUB website*: information on accreditation and the VSMA Framework at the UB Agency for Policy and Quality.

*AQU website*: information on accreditation and the VSMA Framework at AQU.

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