INFORMATION ON THE PROCESS

Assessing accreditation of internationalization in the MSc in Economics in 2017

Context: the EHEA
The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) comprises all countries that agreed to participate in the Bologna Process, i.e. almost all European countries.

Since 2010, these countries have had to adapt their higher education qualifications (bachelor’s degrees, university master’s degrees and doctorates) to the requirements set out in the agreement.

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

Quality in higher education
The VSMA Framework was created to ensure quality in higher education. It comprises four processes that are used to oversee all official degree programmes:

- Validation (ex-ante assessment)
- Follow-up and monitoring
- Modification
- Accreditation

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU), which is responsible for monitoring the quality of higher education in Catalonia, uses the following mechanisms to oversee degree programmes:

1. Validation report for the degree programme: this must be approved by AQU in advance. 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’s webpage.

2. / 3. Annual follow-up and monitoring reports (written at the end of the academic year by the Faculty itself and publicized), and the accreditation process itself, which is undertaken by AQU.
Accreditation of degrees

The accreditation methodology has been used for many years in English-speaking countries to assess the results of organizations in the public and semi-public sector and guarantee 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 them.

There are two essential steps in any accreditation process:
- Preparation of a self-assessment report by the organization seeking accreditation
- A site visit by a panel of independent experts

Compulsory accreditation

Once a recognized degree programme has been taught for a certain length of time, the accreditation process can take place and must be renewed periodically:
- Bachelor’s degrees and doctorates: every six years
- Master’s degrees: every four years

AQU has established six dimensions or standards to be assessed, which are as follows:
- Standard 1. Quality of the programme design
- Standard 2. Relevance of the public information
- Standard 3. Effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system
- Standard 4. Quality of the teaching staff
- Standard 5. Effectiveness of the learning support systems
- Standard 6. Quality of programme outcomes

If a degree programme is granted accreditation, this can take the form of:
- Accreditation with excellence
- Accreditation
- Accreditation with conditions (when shortfalls are identified that do not interfere with the running of the degree but must be resolved within a two-year period under the supervision of AQU)

In these cases, the appraisal can be made public via quality labels provided by AQU.

By contrast, when accreditation is not granted, the degree cannot be offered to new students and will gradually be withdrawn.

The MSc in Economics, along with seven other master’s degrees, underwent assessment for accreditation at the end of 2016 and was accredited with excellence in the spring of 2017.
Voluntary accreditation of additional dimensions

The compulsory accreditation of a degree programme is designed to guarantee minimum thresholds within the six dimensions established. However, a degree programme may stand out as above average in specific areas of interest. AQU offers the possibility of being assessed for accreditation in three additional dimensions:

- Internationalization
- Interaction between research and teaching
- Employment outcomes and development

Voluntary accreditation in any of these dimensions implies that minimum quality levels have already been verified in the accreditation procedure; these additional dimensions provide evidence of exceptional quality or a mark of excellence. A degree programme seeking accreditation of an additional dimension must demonstrate above-average commitment and results.

The MSc in Economics has chosen to be assessed for accreditation of its internationalization dimension in 2017.

Receiving accreditation for an additional dimension involves an addition to the official quality label:

![AQU accreditation logo]

Accreditation stages

With regard to accreditation, the Faculty is involved in two stages of the process:

- Preparation of the self-assessment report and associated evidence. This was started in February 2017 and the report was delivered to AQU on 10 March 2017.
- A site visit by the External Assessment Committee (CAE) to take place on Wednesday, 17 May 2017. At the end of the visit, the CAE will provide preliminary feedback on its assessment.

The final accreditation report will be issued by AQU several months after the site visit following a consultation process.

AQU’s accreditation guide

AQU is responsible for the entire Catalan university accreditation process and for establishing and ensuring compliance with regulations based on state-wide legislation. All the guidelines are included in the latest version of AQU’s Guide to the Assessment of Additional Dimensions, which can be accessed online.

The guidelines include the structure required for the self-assessment report, a definition of these dimensions, the assessment rubrics and a description of the entire assessment procedure, whose design is based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) (ENQA, 2015).
The self-assessment report

Aim of the self-assessment report

This document is designed to present an analysis of the degree programme’s internationalization dimension over the last five academic years.

In addition, it provides access to the evidence, which is stored in an area of the Virtual Campus (see below).

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

Preparation of the self-assessment report

The Internal Assessment Committee (CAI) is responsible for drawing up the self-assessment report. This panel is created for the purpose of accreditation and comprises individuals from different areas of the Faculty who are involved in the quality of the degree programme, including the dean, student representatives and all heads of studies.

The report can be accessed by the entire University of Barcelona community from the Faculty’s website, through the following link: self-assessment report.

Structure of the self-assessment report

The structure of the self-assessment report is determined by the guidelines set out in AQU’s Guide to the Assessment of Additional Dimensions.

The internationalization dimension is analysed in accordance with three standards:

- Standard A. Study programme for internationalization
- Standard B. Internationalization of the teaching staff
- Standard C. Results of internationalization

After the assessment, each standard is given a level: quality-level compliant, compliant or non-compliant. The results of the three standards count towards the overall assessment of the internationalization dimension.

Although it is not assessed per se, the improvement plan is also crucial and includes measures aimed at improving any shortfalls that have been identified.
Evidence
All 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 may include information that already exists on the websites of the University or Faculty (linked from the document), or specifically created documents uploaded to the Virtual Campus area reserved for the current accreditation process.

Site visit by the CAE
The visit to our Faculty, which has been scheduled by AQU to take place on Wednesday, 17 May 2017, will be carried out by an independent *External Assessment Committee* (CAE) made up of several experts: two academics (one of whom will act as chairperson), a student and an AQU accreditation methodology expert (who will act as secretary).

This committee has been organized to assess the internationalization dimension of several degree programmes in a number of Catalan universities. All of these assessments will take place around the same time. During the site visit (see the [timetable](#)), the CAE will interview the following groups:

- The Faculty Board and programme coordinators
- Students
- Academic staff (PDI)
- Support staff (PAS)

*The aim of the site visit is to obtain further detail about the information* presented in the self-assessment report and the evidence, and to clarify any concerns the CAE may have. The CAE will use the self-assessment report, evidence and opinions of the interest groups to assess the internationalization of the MSc in Economics.

For more information...

**Guide to the Assessment of Additional Dimensions**: the present document provides an overview of the process. To find out more, see the guide and references therein.

**Accreditations in the Faculty of Economics and Business**: complete information concerning the accreditation processes taking place in the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEE, in Catalan) in 2016 and 2017.

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

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

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

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

Information requests and queries: qualitat.fee@ub.edu