



FOLLOW-UP REPORT

Unibasq - the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System underwent its second review in 2018, a process involving the external assessment of its activities in accordance with the ESG 2015, and with a positive decision in February 2019 with some recommendations.

This document summarizes the actions taken since the last review took place regarding the areas for development detected by the Board:

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. Unibasq is recommended to clearly distinguish its ESG-based evaluation procedures and its consultancy activities.

The review report stated, *“Finally, the panel has noticed in its discussions with several stakeholders that a clear conceptual distinction between ESG-based evaluation and consultancy activities is lacking within Unibasq. The ex-ante evaluation of ‘títulos propios’ at the UPV/EHU may be considered as consultancy. This type of activity may allow the agency to diversify its activities and capitalize on its expertise. Although the panel did not find any problematic interference between evaluation and consultancy activities, it recommends the agency to clearly distinguish those activities and thus prevent any potential conflict of interest.”* If there was no problematic interference, why the recommendation? In fact, the difference is clear for our institutions as our ESG-based evaluation activities lead to a binding report for any accreditation or certification decision, while our consultancy activities lead to a report which someone else (institution or government) might take into account for their own decision-making processes.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid further misleading situations, Unibasq held specific meetings with the UPV/EHU and sent a formal letter regarding this issue and the information that was available on the webpage of the university has been corrected and it doesn't state anymore that the “Títulos propios” are accredited by Unibasq. In addition, a new agreement was signed with the UPV/EHU stating the conditions on any information published regarding the review of “Títulos propios”. This new agreement was approved by Unibasq's Governing Council at its meeting of the 15th July 2019, where the topic was presented and where the three presidents of the three universities of the Basque University System have a sit. Moreover, currently there is no information on Unibasq webpage that can give misleading information regarding this issue as the information regarding “Títulos propios” have been erased from the section related to study programmes and the different review procedures in order to avoid misunderstandings.

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

2. Unibasq is recommended to structurally embed the practice of the publication of thematic analyses in its strategy and daily work, providing overview reports which bring together the results of its quality assurance processes and its other activities in order to inform (potential)

students, the regional Government and society at large, and to serve as input for further quality improvement within the higher education system.

The agency will continue with its efforts regarding the development of thematic analysis in the Basque University System and this topic is already included in the new strategic plan.

During the last years, and as a result of the involvement in different international projects, the following publications have been published:

Current practices on external quality assurance of academic recognition among QA agencies (ENQA occasional paper): <https://www.unibasq.eus/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Current-practices-on-EQA-of-academic-recognition-among-QA-agencies.pdf>

Integrating Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance: Practical Recommendations as result of the project LIREQA: Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance: https://www.unibasq.eus/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/LIREQA_recommendations_final_version_web.pdf

Implementing the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes - Background report as part of the project ImpEA: Facilitating implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes: https://www.unibasq.eus/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/IO2_report_formated-2.pdf

In this last project, the main outcome is the European approach toolkit: <https://impea.eu/>

Finally, regarding international projects, the main outcome of the INNOMETH project (Assessment of innovative methodologies in teaching and learning in the Basque University System), the guide for reviewing these innovative methodologies is available: https://www.unibasq.eus/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Guia_evaluacion_INNOMETH_en.pdf. The outcomes of the project will be presented at the INQAAHE conference 2021 and a paper will be published.

Moreover, Unibasq together with some other Spanish agencies is organizing a cycle of webinars on the challenges in university education according to the employer group, till now focused on nursing, tourism and infant and primary education university studies. The main objectives of these webinars are:

- to offer a general and updated overview of the main challenges of university education in from the perspective of the employer community (reflection from an international perspective, although focused on the challenges of the immediate environment),
- to present the opinion of employers on the adequacy of university training in Nursing, Tourism and Infant and Primary Education based on cases studies carried out in Catalonia,
- to debate on what should be the specific areas of improvement for university training in these areas.

In addition, the specific outcomes of the external reviews for the renewal of accreditation of these programmes in different regions in Spain are analysed in depth and shared and the outcomes will be published together with the recordings and presentations.

- Nursing studies: <https://www.aqu.cat/es/analisis-y-datos/jornadas-y-talleres/los-retos-en-la-formacion-universitaria-segun-el-colectivo-empleador-el-caso-de-los-estudios-universitarios-en-enfermeria>
- Tourism studies: <https://www.aqu.cat/es/analisis-y-datos/jornadas-y-talleres/los-retos-en-la-formacion-universitaria-segun-el-colectivo-empleador-el-caso-de-turismo>
- Infant and Primary Education studies: <https://www.aqu.cat/es/analisis-y-datos/jornadas-y-talleres/Retos-en-la-formacion-universitaria-en-Educacion-Infantil-y-Primaria>

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

- 3. The panel recommends the agency to continue to search for ways to diversify its incomes. Furthermore, the agency is recommended to ensure that enough resources are available to extend its work on thematic analysis.**

Unibasq is a public entity and its main income comes from the Basque Government, in the last years through a programme-contract. Even if the agency can have a small amount of income coming from some other sources (fees, international projects...), the diversification options are limited, as well as the extra funding, since Unibasq is a non-profit organization and have to reimburse the surplus money to the Basque Government. That is why, even if Unibasq could take the recommendation as a suggestion, it seems that it has a huge impact in the conclusion of the panel regarding the compliance with this standard, regardless of the resources available.

The agency will continue with its efforts regarding the development of thematic analysis in the Basque University System (see previous section).

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 4. Unibasq is recommended to integrate the concept of student-centred learning as a core element in the agency's work and in its procedures (ESG 1.3).**

As already mentioned in the SER and during the interviews, the concept of student-centred learning is implicit in all the programme reviews, even if the specific term is not explicit in all the documents "In the ex-ante evaluation of Bachelor's and Master's degrees, these aspects are reviewed as part of the criteria dealing with the planning of teaching activities and their expected outcomes. In the ex-ante evaluation of Doctoral programmes, they are reviewed when assessing the educational activities, the programme organisation and achievement of the expected learning outcomes. In the follow-up and accreditation procedures, they are part of the review of delivery and performance indicators, and achievement of learning outcomes (respectively). As the case of AUDIT, this aspect is reviewed when assessing how the centre provides student-centred study programmes. In the case of DOCENTIA, it is part of the planning of teaching activities and their expected outcomes."

Nevertheless in the development of our new institutional accreditation procedure the focus is clearly on the concept of student-centred learning building on the lessons learnt from the INNOMETH project (see section on Thematic analysis – Recommendation 2).

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

- 5. Unibasq is recommended to further develop its quality assurance procedures in order to further increase the fitness for purpose of the whole external quality assurance system, aiming for better balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches.**

Even if from an external point of view there might be a perception of a strong quantitative approach, a qualitative approach is used through Unibasq's external review activities, mainly during the interviews with the different stakeholders and taking into account the reflections they made in their self-evaluation reports. A set of indicators are used to monitor the delivery of the programmes and the IQAS of the schools and faculties and we check the evolution of them during our external reviews, but always taking into account the context and reasoning the managing teams give. As said, this quantitative information is used together with qualitative information gathered during the interviews and the evidences the universities give access to.

- 6. The panel recommends to involve the Advisory Board more often at a strategic level in the development of the longer term strategy and vision of the agency on the development of the external quality assurance framework in the Basque country.**

During the development of Unibasq's strategy, all the agency's bodies are involved to take into account their views regarding the development of the external quality assurance framework in the Basque Country. This includes our Advisory Board, which apart from fine-tuning all the review procedures and approving the evaluation criteria, assesses all the review activities done by the agency and propose actions for further improvement. The Advisory Board had a relevant role in the development of the new strategic plan 2020-2023, as can be seen in the attached link.

<https://www.unibasq.eus/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Plan-Estrat%C3%A9gico-2020-2023-Unibasq.pdf>

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

- 7. Unibasq is recommended to further research ways to offer the available information in a more integrated way, making both quantitative and qualitative data easily accessible and comparable for all stakeholders, including students and employers.**

Unibasq publishes on its webpage the review reports under the specific procedure area, so all the information regarding the specific procedure (legal framework, standards and guidelines, evaluation committees, etc.) and its objectives are clear. In addition, since the creation of the Observatory of the Basque University System activity (<https://observatorio.unibasq.eus/en/bachelor-degrees/>) each degree has a specific area where all the related indicators and its different review reports can be reached. This way, quantitative (indicators) and qualitative (review reports with recommendations and good practices) data are easily available for all kind of stakeholders. We are currently updating the Observatory in order to make the information available to our main stakeholders more clearly and focusing in a small number of indicators. We will also include some introductory text to help better understand the information provided.

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

- 8. Unibasq is recommended to split the Ethics and Guarantees Committee and make sure the Appeals Committee is composed of members who are independent from the agency and the Basque higher education system.**

Unibasq was already thinking on changing the composition of the Ethics and Guarantees Committee in order to become more independent from the agency and the Basque Higher education system, but still thinks that having just one body could be enough. The staff from the agency will have just a methodological and supportive role and no member of the agency's direction will be part of the Committee.

On 15 July 2019, Unibasq's Governing Council approved a new Ethics and Guarantees Code. The new Code establishes that the Committee is composed of experts from outside the Basque University System: one student appointed by Unibasq Students' Consultative Committee and two experts appointed one by the Governing Council and another by the Advisory Board. The new members were appointed in the meetings of the Advisory Board (27 September 2019) and of the Governing Council (21 October 2019).

<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/social-responsability-3/>