

**Report of the External Review of the Agencia
para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de
Castilla y León (ACSUCYL)**

9 December 2009

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1 Executive Summary

This report analyses the compliance of the Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León (ACSUCYL) with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for external quality assurance agencies and thus the extent to which it fulfils the membership criteria for the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The review has been coordinated by the Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ).

OAQ nominated a panel of international experts to carry out the external review. The review panel was formally approved by the ENQA board and accepted by ACSUCYL. The on-site visit took place at the premises of ACSUCYL in Valladolid on the 30 September – 2 October 2009.

The review panel finds that ACSUCYL is a very professional, organised and efficient Quality Assurance Agency. Everyone involved in the assessment procedures fulfils their tasks with dedication and professionalism. ACSUCYL has in place very good instruments for internal quality assurance. The panel suggests that ACSUCYL not only continue the productive dialogue with the universities and the authorities but also develops activities and instruments to assure that their work is also noticed by a broader public.

The law gave ACSUCYL a range of very different tasks to handle. These tasks each require individual criteria and procedures. The individual aspects of the procedures are very important but so is the communication between the different units. The panel considers that it is essential for the work of any agency that transversal communication is both encouraged and established.

The legal basis of ACSUCYL is at the moment being amended. According to article 42.6 of the draft bill amending law 3/2003 of 28 march the assessment commissions shall adopt the final assessment decisions taken by the quality assurance agency. The panel finds that with article 42.6 the independence of the assessment decisions is guaranteed and that the amendment of the legal basis further consolidates the independence of ACSUCYL in all its functions.

With regard to the recommendations made by ENQA in 2007¹ the panel finds that ACSUCYL has taken these recommendations very seriously and developed a systematic plan to implement improvements. The panel was impressed with what has been achieved in a very short time. In particular the amendment of law 3/2003 of 28 March (though not completely finalised yet) was established in a very short timeframe which is not self-evident if one considers the length a revision of a legal framework can take in any country.

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that in the performance of its functions, ACSUCYL is fully compliant with most of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area regarding sections 2 and 3. In a number of cases the panel finds ACSUCYL substantially but not completely compliant. To assist ACSUCYL the panel has provided some recommendations and suggestions that ACSUCYL may wish to reflect on.

The Panel recommends to the board of ENQA that it grant ACSUCYL full membership of ENQA.

¹ Recommendations of ENQA – Annex 2 of this report.

2 Introduction

In December 2007 the Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León (ACSUCYL) was granted candidate membership by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) thereby making the commitment to submit itself to an external assessment no more than two years later. This report is the result of this external assessment. The purpose of the review was to determine whether ACSUCYL meets the criteria for full membership of ENQA, through its fulfilment of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for external quality assurance agencies. The review was organised and conducted according to the ENQA guidelines for national reviews and has been coordinated by the Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ).

3 The Review Process

3.1 The Review Panel

The panel members were selected and chosen by OAQ, formally approved by the ENQA board and accepted by ACSUCYL.

Members of the Expert Panel were:

- Nick Harris (peer leader), UK Bologna expert, director of development and enhancement, QAA, United Kingdom (until 30 September 2008)
- Irene Müller, delegate for international affairs at the Austrian Fachhochschulrat, Austria
- Lluís Ferrer i Caubet, former rector of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain, currently invited professor at the Université Montréal, Faculté de médecine vétérinaire, Montreal, Canada
- Manuel Barbancho, co-founder of the Sociedad Mixta Biovet-UCO S.L, professor at the University of Cordoba, Spain, ex-Director of UCA (former Andalusian University Quality Assurance Agency), Spain

- Severo Natanael de la Calle, student of chemical engineering at the University of Salamanca, Spain
- Stephanie Maurer, scientific collaborator, OAQ, Switzerland (secretary to the panel)

3.2 Self-evaluation report

ACSUCYL produced a self-evaluation report (103 pages), which was sent to the panel two months prior to the on-site visit. The panel also received a folder with annexes containing evidence for the compliance with the standards. Other documents were available on the website of ACSUCYL and during the on-site visit.

In preparation for the development of the self-evaluation report ACSUCYL established a "criteria project". This project aimed to review the actions that had already been taken by ACSUCYL since 2007, and provide guidance and suggestions on how to meet the ESG and the recommendations made by ENQA in 2007, as well as to provide ACSUCYL with other suggestions for improvement. The criteria project involved external experts as well as staff from ACSUCYL.

The panel found the self-evaluation report to be very well presented and the set out very clearly. Overall the report was a very good document for the preparation of the on-site visit as it addressed all of the important issues relevant to the panel's work. The supporting evidence, to ACSUCYL's statements made against each of the standards, was provided by a folder with numerous annexes and / or through links to the ACSUCYL website.

The self-evaluation report raised some questions with regard to the Spanish Quality Assurance System, especially among the international panel members, but in all cases these were clarified during the on-site visit.

3.3 Site visit

The expert panel visited the offices of ACSUCYL in Valladolid on 30 September - 2 October 2009. The panel met for a preparatory meeting on the morning of 30 September to discuss the self-evaluation report and share their first impressions regarding the extent of fulfilment of the ESG. The panel also discussed the programme for the visit and initial lines of questioning were distributed among panel members.

During the three-day visit the panel met with different groups of stakeholders.² The organisation of the visit was excellent and all interviews were held according to the schedule. ACSUCYL support regarding logistical organisation, accommodation and meals was exceptional.

Some of the interviewees did not feel comfortable being interviewed in English, and a translator was present during all of the interviews to facilitate the discussion. The task of translation was not an easy one as there were often large groups of people to deal with. The way the translator mastered this difficult task was outstanding. The precision of the translations allowed the non-Spanish speaking panel members to follow the discussion with ease.

The panel was impressed by the lively, engaged, and open discussions in the interviews, and ACSUCYL staff were at all times available and provided the panel with access to all necessary documents.

4 Context of the review

4.1 The Higher Education System of Castilla y León

The Higher Education System of Castilla y León comprises eight universities (four public and four private). The University of Salamanca (founded in 1218) and the University of Valladolid (founded in 1293) are among the oldest in Europe. Over 90% of students are enrolled at public universities. The universities of Salamanca and Valladolid are the largest with approx. 25,000 students each. Among the private universities the

² Programme of the visit, see annex 1.

Pontifical University of Salamanca is the largest with approx. 5,000 students enrolled.

In Spain university policy is the responsibility of the autonomous communities. The national law 6/2001 of 21 December (LOU) governing the universities establishes basic university regulations that define the powers and competences of universities, regions and national authorities. Following the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) this law was amended by law 4/2007 of 12 April, which is leading to the introduction of the three cycle structure (Graduate / Master / Doctorate) according to the 'Bologna system'.

The university system of Castilla y León is based on article 35 of the statute of autonomy of Castilla y León. Law 3/2003 of 28 March, governing universities in Castilla y León, defines the powers assigned to the region in the area of higher education. This law regulates the university system in Castilla y León with regard to each university as well as interuniversity coordination.

4.2 The quality assurance system in Castilla y León

4.2.1 Legal framework

The national law 6/2001 of 21 December states that ensuring quality assurance in Spanish universities, at both national and international scale, is a key goal of university policy. Activities related to the quality assurance procedures are within the competence of the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA) and the assessment bodies established by regional law. The amendment to this national law, the organic law 4/2007 of 12 April, establishes that ANECA and the regional bodies shall, in application of international standards, establish mechanisms for cooperation and mutual recognition.

Law 3/2003 of 28 March governing universities in Castilla y León states that ACSUCYL is the external assessment body of Castilla y León. Its tasks are among others to promote and ensure quality in universities through evaluation, certification and accreditation of courses taught in degrees which form part of the university system in Castilla y León.

4.2.2 ACSUCYL

The Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León (ACSUCYL) was established by agreement on 15 November 2001. This agreement, signed by the president of the Castilla y León regional government and the regional education and culture minister, states that the agency should be a useful tool not only to encourage and implement quality measures and continuous assessments in universities but also to promote quality education actions, as well as to collect and focus the constant flow of information among universities as well as their clients and users³. Law 3/2003 of 28 March formally establishes ACSUCYL as the external assessment body of the region. The legal basis of ACSUCYL is currently in a process of change. An amendment to law 3/2003 is being discussed in the regional parliament and will be passed in the near future. A particular aim of this amendment is to change the legal status of ACSUCYL.⁴

ACSUCYL started its work with the assessments of teaching staff in 2003 and then gradually set out to conduct the activities that it was legally assigned to do (teaching staff assessments, assessment of degree programmes, assessments of research, and institutional quality).

The organisational structure of ACSUCYL consists of the Board of Directors and the Director of ACSUCYL as the governing bodies, with an Advisory Board and the Assessment Bodies.

The Board of Directors is responsible for monitoring the managerial actions and representative tasks such as the approval of the annual activities report, approval and overall control of the budget, approval of staff structure and pay. Members of the Board of Directors are the regional minister responsible for university affairs, the director general for university and research, the rectors of the public universities, one rector from a private university, two presidents of the social councils of

³ Agreement of 15 November 2001, the creation of the consortium "The Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León" (*Official Regional Bulletin of Castilla y León num. 226, 21th November 2001*), translation taken from <http://www.ACSUCYL.es>.

⁴ Details see comments on standard 3.2, page 24.

public universities, two persons from the department responsible for universities, a member of the business sector, two renowned scholars and the director of the agency.

The director of the agency is appointed by the board of directors for a period of four years, which can be renewed for a further four years, without restriction on the number of renewals. The director is appointed on the grounds of technical criteria and following an open public call with set requirements. The director is responsible for the management of ACSUCYL's daily business as well as the appointment of the assessment commissions, the assessment committees and the advisory board.

The advisory board is a consultative body and responsible for the analysis on how the agency is run and for recommendations for improvement. Members of the advisory board are national and international experts from the academic and the business worlds, as well as experts on the EHEA.

The assessment bodies are divided into assessment commissions, specific panels, assessment committees, and scientific panels.

The assessment commissions are most importantly responsible for the final decisions of the assessment procedures. Also they plan, design and approve the assessment methodology and procedures to be applied.

There are four assessment commissions:

- Teaching staff assessment commission
- Degree assessment commission
- Research assessment commission
- Quality assessment commission

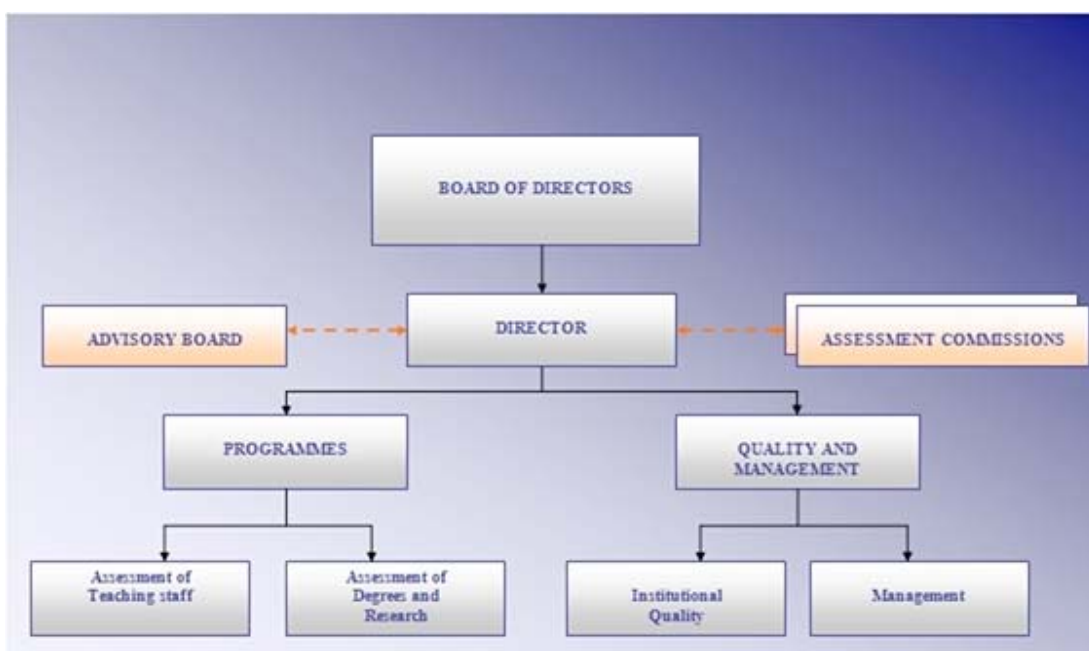
Each of these commissions has a president. The members are appointed by the director of the agency; the presidents of the commissions may propose other members for the commission and voice his/her opinion on suggested members. All members of the commissions are chosen according to predefined criteria. The criteria are published and can be found in the handbook corresponding to the specific procedure.

The assessment commissions may instigate specific commissions. These

are set up ad hoc when the nature of the assessment requires it.

The assessment committees and scientific panels are responsible for the preliminary reports of the assessments which are forwarded to the corresponding assessment commission. The committees are composed of experts from outside the universities in Castilla y León and are appointed by the director of ACSUCYL at the beginning of each assessment process.

*Organisational structure*⁵



4.3 Activities of ACSUCYL

The procedures conducted by ACSUCYL can be divided into four areas:

- Assessment of degrees
- Assessment of research
- Assessment of teaching staff

⁵ Self-evaluation report, p. 24.

- Institutional quality

4.3.1 Assessment of Degrees

The assessment of degrees involves the assessment of postgraduate studies and the verification of degrees, with work taking place for a follow-up and subsequent full accreditation of degrees.

The assessment of postgraduate studies:

In 2006 the regional authorities laid down the regulations governing the procedure for authorising the introduction of official postgraduate studies in the universities of Castilla y León. The assessment of postgraduate degrees can only be carried out by ACSUCYL. A positive result is necessary for the formal authorisation of the programme. ACSUCYL has been carrying out these assessment procedures since 2006. A total of 191 programmes have been assessed, 133 with a positive result. ACSUCYL has developed a specific procedure based on the assessment criteria for official postgraduate programmes and degrees agreed in conjunction with the other agencies in Spain.

Verification of degrees (VERIFICA programme) / follow-up and accreditation of official degrees:

The VERIFICA programme was introduced in 2008. The aim of this programme is to assess the conformity of the new degrees with the Bologna recommendations. In accordance with the national legal framework, the responsibility to assess the programmes prior to their ratification lies with ANECA. The procedure is a compulsory ex-ante assessment. Positive assessment of the degrees will result in the verification of the degree and the inclusion in the register of universities and degrees, Centres and Degrees (RUCT). Inclusion in the register gives the university the authorisation to offer this degree and the degree is considered as being accredited. The verified degrees are submitted to a yearly follow-up. After six years all degrees have to undergo a full accreditation procedure. The accreditation is valid for six years.

ANECA and ACSUCYL have signed an agreement that establishes that all reports issued by ACSUCYL on the assessment of Bachelor and Master degrees prior to their verification will be equivalent to the assessment reports issued by ANECA. On the basis of this agreement ACSUCYL is able to conduct assessments in the framework of the VERIFICA programme. ACSUCYL has yet to carry out such an assessment procedure but is expecting to assess approx. 120 proposals for curricula adapted to Bologna in the coming months.⁶

4.3.2 Assessment of research

The assessment of research includes the assessment of research institutes, the assessment of excellence research groups, the assessment of activities conducted by excellence research groups and research projects, and the assessment of research staff who have recently graduated.

Assessment of university research institutes:

According to law 3/2003 of 28 March an assessment by ACSUCYL is mandatory in order to establish a university research institute. Without a positive assessment result the research institute cannot be authorised and consequently cannot start its work. After the initial positive assessment the research institute has to be re-assessed every five years. ACSUCYL has been conducting these procedures since 2004. Until 2008 a total of 19 research institutes have been assessed, 15 of which achieved a positive result.

Assessment of excellence research groups:

The regional ministry of education, in order to promote research excellence, has introduced a register of recognised excellence research groups. Prior to inclusion in this register these groups have to be assessed by ACSUCYL. Since 2006 a total of 133 applications have been assessed.⁷

⁶ Self-evaluation report, p. 44.

⁷ In the self-evaluation report a success rate is not mentioned.

Assessment of excellence research groups' activities and research projects:

The ministry of education announces calls offering financial support aimed at consolidating excellence research groups as well as promoting stable research groups and projects undertaken by new research groups. ACSUCYL assesses the applications received under these calls. Since 2007 169 applications for the funding of research programmes to be carried out by excellence research groups and 313 applications for support for research projects have been assessed.

Evaluation of research staff who recently graduated:

The regional ministry of education offers financial support for the hiring of research staff who recently graduated from university. ACSUCYL has been assessing the applications submitted for these funding calls since 2005. In 2009 a total of 298 applications have so far been assessed. 100 applications have been granted.

4.3.3 Assessment of teaching staff

The assessment of teaching staff includes the assessment of teaching activities and the assessment of teaching staff.

Assessment of teaching activities (DOCENTIA programme):

The DOCENTIA programme has been developed in collaboration with ANECA and the other regional Agencies in 2007. The goal of this programme is to support universities in the design and application of their own procedures to ensure quality among universities teaching staff and to foster development and recognition of the programme.

Seven of the eight universities of Castilla y León have participated in this programme on a voluntary basis. ACSUCYL has evaluated the models for the evaluation of the teaching staff with regard to their compliance with the standards set in the DOCENTIA programme. Six of these models have

been evaluated positively. The six models have to be implemented in two years time and will then be assessed with a view to their certification.

Assessment of teaching staff:

The assessment of recently hired teaching staff is a core element of the national legal framework for universities.⁸ It aims at ensuring that a person must comply with minimum quality standards before they can join a university as a teacher. Emeritus teachers also have to undergo an assessment prior to their hiring by a university. Teachers working at a university may be re-assessed every five years on a voluntary basis. These re-assessments have an influence on their salary.

The assessment of teaching staff was the first activity of ACSUCYL. Since 2003 2219 applications for part-time teaching have been assessed, 2053 of which with a positive result. 4063 assessments of teaching staff prior to their hiring have been conducted 2177 of these with a positive result.

4.3.4 Institutional quality

Institutional quality includes the updating of teaching methods, the adaptation to the EHEA structures and priorities, the promoting of quality assurance systems in university institutions, and the assessment of quality assurance systems (the AUDIT programme).

The updating of teaching methods, adaptation to the EHEA and the promoting of quality assurance systems in university institutions are all activities of ACSUCYL with the aim of giving universities incentives to promote projects and develop further in the areas mentioned. To achieve this aim ACSUCYL announces annual calls offering financial support to the universities. Funding is usually (but not in all cases) restricted to the public universities. Since 2006 a total of 34 projects have been assessed and funded. ACSUCYL will discontinue this approach to the funding of projects in the coming year.

⁸ Organic law 6/2001 of 21 December governing universities; organic law 4/2007 of 12 April amending organic law 6/2001.

Assessment of quality assurance systems (AUDIT programme):

The AUDIT programme has been developed in cooperation with ANECA. The aim of this programme is to offer support in the design of internal quality assurance systems. In 2009 ANECA and ACSUCYL set up a commission for the AUDIT Programme in order to ensure the continuity of the collaboration in the development of processes. To date six centres representing five universities have taken part in the AUDIT programme.

5 Compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

5.1 ESG 3.1 - Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

The external quality assurance agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance procedures described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Compliance with the standards of Part 2 of the ESG are analysed in the following chapters. Compliance with these standards is only relevant with regard to the overall compliance with standard 3.1.

5.1.1 ESG 2.1 - Use of internal quality assurance procedures

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Specific standards have been developed to assess internal quality assurance processes for all of ACSUCYL's activities⁹, especially in the area of institutional quality. More specifically, in the newly established AUDIT programme, internal quality assurance mechanisms and systems are the core of these assessments. Since 2006 ACSUCYL has been very active in promoting quality assurance systems in universities. As described above¹⁰ this has mainly been done through the funding of selected projects in this area. In addition to these projects ACSUCYL tries to raise questions of internal quality assurance processes with the universities through the organisation of workshops and meetings of the quality units of the universities of Castilla y León.

⁹ Self-evaluation report, p. 83 (graph).

¹⁰ See chapter 4.3.4 of this report.

The panel commends the way ACSUCYL works together with the universities and in assisting them to start communicating with each other about internal quality and thus encouraging them to develop further in this area.

Some of the panel members were very surprised that ACSUCYL is actively funding projects in the area of internal quality assurance. With further development of the AUDIT programme and the possible change to a mandatory audit system the question was raised about possible conflict of interest if ACSUCYL is funding projects to support quality assurance systems it will later assess. ACSUCYL explained that the funding of projects started three years ago with the aim to help the universities to build up capacities to implement new projects. However ACSUCYL plans to discontinue this practice and 2010 will be the final year the projects will be subsidised.

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 2.1.

5.1.2 ESG 2.2 - Development of external quality assurance processes

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

All information related to the different activities of ACSUCYL is published on its website. The information is divided into the sections: general information, process and criteria, assessment bodies and results.

The board of directors approves the annual action plan of ACSUCYL. The action plan explains the aims and objectives of the quality assurance processes. After the approval it too is published on the website.

The processes are developed by the assessment commissions. Members of the assessment commissions are scholars and professionals in the area of teaching and research who have experience in management and in quality assessment processes in the area of universities. Through the composition of the assessment commissions ACSUCYL assures that the

quality assurance processes are developed by representatives of all responsible stakeholders.

In the interviews the panel found that the universities are very well informed about the criteria, the processes and the instruments of the different procedures. All representatives of the universities the panel spoke to were aware that in case of a complaint about the processes they can make their voice heard and a discussion with ACSUCYL will follow.

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 2.2.

5.1.3 ESG 2.3 - Criteria for decisions

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

The criteria for all procedures are published on the website of ACSUCYL. The representatives of the universities confirmed that they are all informed about the criteria and how the criteria are applied.

The final decisions of the assessment procedures are the responsibility of the assessment commissions. These commissions see to it that the reports come to a conclusion that is consistent with other reports. When talking to representatives of the universities the panel learnt that decisions and criteria are understandable and the universities consider that the criteria are applied consistently.

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 2.3.

5.1.4 ESG 2.4 - Process fit for purpose

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

ACSUCYL carries out different procedures with different aims and objectives. The aims and objectives of the different processes are clearly defined and the processes have been developed accordingly. The processes always include a self-evaluation report, an assessment by

experts and a final report/decision by the assessment commission. It is not (yet) clearly defined when an on-site visit by external experts should take place. Some assessment procedures require a better understanding as to when and how on-site visits are necessary to achieve their aims.

The panel was surprised to learn that in the assessment of research institutes an on-site visit is generally not part of the procedure. The possibility exists but when asked the members of the assessment commission did not have clear criteria as to when an on-site visit is included in the procedures.

The panel finds that in order to fully comply with this standard ACSUCYL must review its practice with regard to on-site visits and develop clear criteria for the introduction of these visits.

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **substantially complies** with standard 2.4.

5.1.5 ESG 2.5 – Reporting

Reports should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

ACSUCYL publishes the reports of all its assessment procedures except in the area of teacher assessment, which are confidential due to reasons of data protection legislation.

To assure that the reports are consistent and the arguments coherent with other reports ACSUCYL provides the experts with guidelines on how to write reports. Reports should be written in a clear, objective and readable style. The assessment commission is responsible for assuring the quality and the coherence of the reports. When asked, the representatives of the universities were satisfied with the quality of the reports.

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 2.5.

5.1.6 ESG 2.6 - Follow-up procedures

Quality Assurance Processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have predetermined follow-up procedure, which is implemented consistently.

ACSUCYL has developed and introduced follow-up procedures in the assessment of the degrees, the assessment of research institutes, the assessment of research projects, the DOCENTIA programme and the funded projects.

As some of the assessments have only just been introduced and in some cases the assessments are yet to start (e.g. the VERIFICA programme), it was not possible for ACSUCYL to actually undertake these follow-up procedures yet.

Nevertheless the panel finds that ACSUCYL has established the necessary procedures and instruments to carry out follow-up procedures and therefore **fully complies** with standard 2.6.

5.1.7 ESG 2.7 - Periodic reviews

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

The assessment procedures of ACSUCYL have been developed within the framework of the Spanish legislation and the legislation of Castilla y León.

Of all the activities of ACSUCYL, the verification of official degrees, the assessment of research institutes, the DOCENTIA programme and the assessment of teaching staff are all carried out periodically.

The verified official degrees have to be reviewed every six years, research institutes must be reviewed every five years, and in the framework of the DOCENTIA programme teaching staff assessment models must be reviewed two years after being verified by ACSUCYL. In

the framework of the teaching staff assessments the assessments are conducted every five years on a voluntary basis.

As is the case for the follow-up procedures, the first cycle of assessments has not ended yet. ACSUCYL has yet to carry out a second cycle of reviews.

However, the length of the cycles of the external quality assurance and the procedures to be used are clearly defined and published in advance.

The panel considers ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 2.7.

5.1.8 ESG 2.8 - System-wide analysis

Quality Assurance should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

ACSUCYL publishes various reports on its activities. There are annual reports on the current state of external quality assessments in Spanish universities, situation reports, which are published periodically and are submitted to the board of directors, reports on the outcomes of each assessment process, an annual activities report, and internal meta-evaluation reports.

However, the panel learnt during the on-site visit that there is no analysis and comparison between the different units and commissions of ACSUCYL. The panel was surprised to learn that the interview session with the panel was the first official meeting of all the presidents of the different assessment commissions. The panel recommends that ACSUCYL should introduce formal meetings between the units and/or the presidents of the assessment commission to assure that good practices are being shared and a real system-wide analysis of the processes is possible.

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **substantially complies** with standard 2.8.

Summary

Even though the above paragraphs include a number of recommendations and reflections, and two cases of substantial rather than full compliance, regarding the standards of section 2, the panel is of the view that overall ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 3.1.

5.2 ESG 3.2 - Official Status

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdiction within they operate.

ACSUCYL was founded by agreement in 2001. The Law 3/2003 of 28 March formally established ACSUCYL as the external assessment body for the university system of the region and defined its functions. At the moment an amendment to law 3/2003 is being discussed in the regional parliament and is planned to enter into force in the coming months. This amendment does not change the functions of ACSUCYL but rather its legal status, defining it as a public body governed by private law assigned to the regional ministry competent in university affairs¹¹.

The panel considers it evident that ACSUCYL functions on a clear and established legal basis and is recognised by the competent authorities of Castilla y León. Also, the panel found that the strategic plan of ACSUCYL is well established and clearly complies with the requirements set out by the law.

ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 3.2.

¹¹ Art. 32, draft bill amending law 3/2003 of 28 March.

5.3 ESG 3.3 - Activities

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

The activities of ACSUCYL can be divided in four areas:

- Assessment of degrees
- Assessment of research
- Assessment of teaching staff
- Institutional quality

ACSUCYL has been appointed by law to conduct the external quality assurance activities in each of these areas. The activities of ACSUCYL are described in detail in Chapter 4.3 of this report.

Due to the development of national and regional policies in quality assurance as well as the implementation of the Bologna process in Spain, the range of activities of ACSUCYL has changed in recent years and some of the activities are just about to start (i.e. the VERIFICA Programme). The DOCENTIA programme and the AUDIT Programme have been running for the past two years.

For the review panel it is obvious that ACSUCYL undertakes a wide range of quality assurance activities on a regular basis. Evidence for this is the overview of the assessments that have been conducted since 2003. With regard to the new activities (such as the VERIFICA programme), the panel finds that ACSUCYL is aware of the challenges to come and is very well prepared to handle them.

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 3.3.

5.4 ESG 3.4 - Resources

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective manner with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

ACSUCYL receives its annual funding from the regional ministry of education at the regional government of Castilla y León. Since it was set up the budget allocated to ACSUCYL each year has increased. The board of directors is responsible for the approval and the control of the budget. For the year 2009 ACSUCYL has been allocated € 2,325,000. 80% of ACSUCYL's annual budget is allotted to activities related to evaluation and assessment.

The panel finds that the financial resources allocated to ACSUCYL are more than adequate to fulfil the purposes and functions set out by law.

Since 2001 the number of staff of ACSUCYL has increased gradually. ACSUCYL now has 12 members of staff and a director. The members of staff are divided into "specialists" and "administrative staff". At the moment there are 10 specialists and 2 administrative staff. Each specialist is member of one of the four units: teaching staff assessment unit, degree and research assessment unit, institutional quality unit, and management unit (see also Chapter 4.2.2 of this report). The director of the agency is responsible for the management of staff.

All specialists must hold a university degree and have a working knowledge of English.

Even though some staff members have a very good command of English this is not the case for everyone. In the opinion of the panel ACSUCYL could introduce measures to help staff members to further improve their knowledge of English. This will be of increasing importance in view of the prospect of a full ENQA membership and the subsequent role of ACSUCYL in the international community of quality assurance agencies.

The panel was concerned that there was no assigned deputy director. Panel members were assured that ACSUCYL could function perfectly well if the director should be unavailable for a (longer) period of time as all staff members have clearly defined responsibilities and roles. However,

the panel finds that ACSUCYL ought to consider introducing a post of deputy director if only for covering emergency cases.

The panel was very impressed by the professionalism and commitment of all members of staff. For the panel it is evident that the working atmosphere at ACSUCYL is excellent giving the impression of 'a family with good relationships'.

The panel visited the offices of ACSUCYL and found them very accommodating, spacious and very well equipped.

The panel finds that ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 3.4.

5.5 ESG 3.5 - Mission statement

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, set down in a publicly available statement.

The mission of ACSUCYL is defined in four different documents. The general mission is set out by law, stating that ACSUCYL's mission is to ensure quality in the university system of Castilla y León thus contributing to the continual improvement thereof and thereby creating value for society.¹²

The strategic plan of ACSUCYL further details this mission setting out the vision of the future, the goals which it aims to achieve in the coming five years, as well as the values of the agency.

Furthermore ACSUCYL has a quality assurance policy detailing its commitments in the area of the internal quality assurance of the agency.

The action plan of ACSUCYL defines the strategic goals for the coming years and the action programme substantiates them.

The panel finds that the mission of ACSUCYL is clearly defining the aims and objectives of the Agency.

However, the mission of ACSUCYL is not set down in one publicly available statement but in four, none of which is actually called "Mission

¹² Self-evaluation report, p. 61.

Statement". An interested person could have difficulties recognising the actual mission or understanding that the four documents together define the mission of ACSUCYL.

The panel finds that in order to fully comply with this standard ACSUCYL should develop a single document labelled "Mission Statement" which combines all the most important elements from the different documents mentioned above and which is to be published on the agency's website

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **substantially complies** with Standard 3.5.

5.6 ESG 3.6 - Independence

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

The independence of ACSUCYL has been formally recognised in the founding agreement of 15 November 2001. In this agreement the governing bodies of ACSUCYL are defined as the board of directors and the director of the agency. The governing structure is characterised by a substantial participation of representatives of the regional government and the universities. The tasks of the board of directors are clearly defined and are restricted to duties concerning financial and management issues. The board of directors is informed of the assessment decisions but only in terms of statistics. In its discussions with the panel, the members of the board of directors made it very clear that they are not concerned with individual reports nor have they or would they have any intention of interfering in any way in the assessment procedures.

The responsibility for the assessment procedures and decisions lies with the respective assessment commissions. In cases of conflict the final responsibility for the decisions made by ACSUCYL still lies with the board of directors. Even though the board is not actively involved in the assessment procedures, and there has never been case where the board of directors had to formally take the responsibility for an assessment

decision in front of a court, the fact remains that the ultimate responsibility for an assessment decision *currently* lies with the board of directors.

For that reason an amendment to law 3/2003 of 28 March has been established and is planned to enter into force in the coming months.

The statement of purposes of this amendment identifies that "the current situation suggests the advisability of establishing a new legal system (...) enabling the agency's membership of the European Register of Agencies, such that the functions allocated to it may be discharged with sufficient safeguard of independence, a professional approach and the freedom to work which characterise the main European assessment agencies"¹³. Article 42.2 states that the assessment bodies of the quality assurance agency "when undertaking their functions (...) shall act with independence (...)." ¹⁴ More importantly point 6 of article 42 states that the assessment commissions "shall adopt the final assessment decisions taken by the quality assurance agency (...)." ¹⁵ This means that in future the responsibility for the final decision of the assessments will lie completely with each assessment commission. In case of a conflict the assessment commissions will be held responsible.

The assessment commissions are selected according to predefined criteria laid down in the general rules governing the composition and functions of ACSUCYL's assessment bodies. Members of the assessment commission must be professionals with a proven track record in teaching and research as well as experience in management and in quality assessment processes in the area of universities.

The panel finds ACSUCYL's system for the selection of the assessment commissions very good. However, while the assessment committees (the bodies that issue preliminary assessment reports) are composed of experts from outside Castilla y León this is not the case for the assessment commissions. The panel finds that ACSUCYL should further

¹³ Draft bill amending law 3/2003 dated 28 March, governing Universities in Castilla y León; statement of purposes; Self-evaluation report, annex E 1, p. 1.

¹⁴ S.a., annex E 1, p. 9.

¹⁵ S.a., annex E 1, p. 9.

consolidate the independence of the assessment commissions through a better balance between members from Castilla y León and outside. The panel understands that the memberships of the commissions are progressively evolving from largely Castilla y León based towards the impending legal requirement that all members will have to be from outside of Castilla y León.

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 3.6, with the provision that article 42.6 of the draft bill amending law 3/2003 of 28 March enters into force as it was submitted to the panel.

5.7 ESG 3.7 - External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance processes;

an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s) and site visit as decided by the agency;

publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;

a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Processes, criteria and procedures used by ACSUCYL are predefined and publicly accessible; this has already been established in chapters 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 of this report.

ACSUCYL assessment procedures include a self-assessment and an external assessment by a group of experts. For the past two years ACSUCYL has developed instruments to establish student participation in its procedures. For that reason ACSUCYL has organised seminars and training workshops. At the moment students are involved in the procedures for the verification of degrees, the follow-up and accreditation of degrees and the DOCENTIA programme.

As established in chapter 5.1.4 of this report the panel is of the opinion that ACSUCYL should have a clearer vision and criteria as to when site visits are conducted.

Final assessment reports are published with the exception of the assessment reports of teaching staff. This is due to reasons of data protection legislation.

ACSUCYL has developed an appeal procedure. The outline of this procedure foresees that the assessment commission may revise their decision. After an internal appeal procedure there is the further possibility to appeal before the administrative courts.

The follow-up procedures have been described in chapter 5.1.6 of this report.

The panel considers that ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 3.7.

5.8 ESG 3.8 - Accountability

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.
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ACSUCYL has introduced different measures for its accountability.

ACSUCYL has published a quality assurance policy. This policy must be approved by the board of directors and is reviewed periodically. In addition ACSUCYL has developed a quality handbook and a code of ethics.

The quality management system of ACSUCYL has been certified by the Spanish Association for Standardisation and Certification (AENOR). The system complies with the standard ISO 9001:2000 and has additionally received the IQNet certificate confirming the international recognition of the AENOR certificate.

The internal quality management system is reviewed every year for verification of the system. It contains internal and external feedback mechanisms and assures that they are carried out periodically and systematically (e.g. suggestions forms, personal interviews, satisfaction surveys, periodic meetings with staff, meetings with the board of directors). Furthermore a purchasing and contracting policy is contained

in this system in order to assure that work carried out by subcontractors is analysed each year.

In its internal quality management system ACSUCYL has a specific procedure for the selection of evaluators. The selection criteria for each process are predefined and published. Evaluators have to sign a no-conflict of interest declaration. Furthermore ACSUCYL has established a code of ethics conduct beyond what is strict compliance with the law¹⁶. All persons involved in an assessment procedure must abide to this code. Information on the members of the assessment commissions is published on the website of ACSUCYL.

Recently ACSUCYL has established an advisory board. Members of the advisory board are experts from the academic, scientific and business world as well as experts on matters relating to the EHEA in the international area. The main function of the advisory board is to analyse how the agency is run and to issue recommendations for improvement. To preserve the agency's independence the board of directors has adopted a somewhat 'passive' role in terms of proposals and advice on policy and procedures and their development. Within this context it may be appropriate to ask the advisory board to take on a more substantial role, whilst remembering that its title indicates the status of its conclusions.

The panel finds that it is evident that ACSUCYL takes internal quality assurance very seriously and that the quality management system is a very important tool for its staff.

ACSUCYL clearly has procedures for its internal accountability in place that are working well. This is provided through different measures especially the internal quality management system. With regard to external accountability there were some questions raised by the panel.

ACSUCYL's mission is to ensure quality in the university system in Castilla y León, thus contributing to the continual improvement thereof and thereby creating value for society.¹⁷

¹⁶ ACSUCYL, Code of Ethics, Preamble.

¹⁷ Self-evaluation report, p. 61.

While ACSUCYL is very well accepted by the national and regional authorities as well as the universities of Castilla y León (both public and private) and has established very good working relationships with them, it is not very well known in the wider community 'outside'. In order to create a value for society the panel finds that ACSUCYL should be more proactive in communicating with a broader public.

Currently only one member of the board of directors directly represent the external stakeholders (i.e. the business sector). ACSUCYL explained to the panel that two other members of the board of directors are the presidents of the social councils of public universities, and thus more than one external stakeholder is actually represented in the board as the social councils themselves have as member external stakeholders. The panel finds this approach too indirect and recommends that ACSUCYL evaluate possibilities for the introduction of more external stakeholders to its different bodies.

Despite the reservations mentioned in the previous paragraph the panel never-the-less finds that overall ACSUCYL **fully complies** with standard 3.8.

6 Conclusion

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that in the performance of its functions, ACSUCYL is fully compliant with most of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area regarding sections 2 and 3. In a number of cases the panel finds ACSUCYL substantially but not completely compliant. To assist ACSUCYL the panel has provided some recommendations and suggestions that ACSUCYL may wish to reflect on.

The review panel finds that ACSUCYL is a very professional, organised and efficient Quality Assurance Agency. Everyone involved in the assessment procedures fulfils their tasks with dedication and professionalism. ACSUCYL has in place very good instruments for internal quality assurance. The panel suggests that ACSUCYL not only continue the productive dialogue with the universities and the authorities but also develops activities and instruments to assure that their work is also noticed by a broader public.

The law gave ACSUCYL a range of very different tasks to handle. These tasks each require individual criteria and procedures. The individual aspects of the procedures are very important but so is the communication between the different units. The panel considers that it is essential for the work of any agency that transversal communication is both encouraged and established. The panel recommends that ACSUCYL organise regular meetings of the presidents of the commissions where topics of general interest are discussed with the staff of ACSUCYL.

The panel noted that in the selection criteria for the assessment commissions the topic of gender equality is not dealt with. The commissions consist of 8 to 10 members with only 1 or 2 female members. The panel suggests that ACSUCYL should pay more attention to questions of gender equality in the selection of its commissions.

With regard to the recommendations made by ENQA in 2007¹⁸ the panel finds that ACSUCYL has taken these recommendations *very* seriously and developed a systematic plan to implement improvements. The panel was impressed with what has been achieved in a very short time. In particular the amendment of law 3/2003 of 28 March (though not completely finalised yet) was established in a very short timeframe particularly when considering the length of time a revision to a legal framework can take, in any country.

The panel learnt of ACSUCYL's intention to initiate the necessary actions to implement the recommendations and commends the initiatives.

Overall the Panel has no hesitation in recommending to the board of ENQA that it grant ACSUCYL full membership of ENQA.

¹⁸ Recommendations of ENQA – Annex 2 of this report.

Site-visit programme for the OAQ-coordinated external
review of ACSUCYL

Day 1: Wednesday 30 September

Session	Time	Group
	8.15	Review panel arrival at ACSUCYL premises: C/Fray Luis de León Nº.10, 2ª Planta, Valladolid (welcome by ACSUCYL)
	8.30 – 12.30	Review panel preparatory meeting (coffee served at 10.00)
	12.30 – 13.45	Review panel lunch: ACSUCYL Premises
S1	13.45 – 15.00	Director of the Agency <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Elena Tejedor Viñuela. Director of ACSUCYL
S2	15.00 – 16.15	Members of the group preparing the self-evaluation report <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mercedes Jaime Sisó. Expert on international quality assurance- Santiago Roca Martín. Expert on international quality assurance- Marinela García Fernández. Expert on international quality assurance- Sandra Marcos Ortega. Responsible for Institutional Quality at ACSUCYL
Break		

Site-visit programme for the OAQ-coordinated external
review of ACSUCYL

S3	16.45 – 17.45	<p>Staff. Programmes Unit/Quality and Management Unit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sara Junquera Merino. Responsible for Assessment of Degrees - Sonia Martín Cerro. Responsible for Assessment of Research - Amaya Urbaneja Ortega. Responsible for Teaching Staff Assessment - Sandra Marcos Ortega. Responsible for Assessment of Institutional Quality
S4	17.45 – 18.45	<p>Members of Regional Ministry, Parliament</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Juan José Mateos Otero. Regional Minister for Education in Castilla y León - Juan Casado Canales. General Director for Universities and Research in Castilla y León
	18.45 – 20.00	Review Panel meeting / discussion
	20.30 –	<p>Social Program. (Optional). To be confirm.</p> <p>Review panel dinner :</p> <p>Name: Restaurante La Parrilla de San Lorenzo Address: Calle Pedro Niño, 1 Tel +34 983 335088</p>

Site-visit programme for the OAQ-coordinated external
review of ACSUCYL

Day 2: Thursday 1 October

Session	Time	Group
S5	8.30 – 9.45	<p>Assessment Commissions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pedro Chacón Fuertes. President of the Degree Assessment Commission - Miguel Valcárcel Cases. President of the Research Assessment Commission - Constanío González Martínez. President of the Teaching Staff Assessment Commission - Mercedes Jaime Sisó. President of the Quality Assessment Commission
S6	9.45 – 11.00	<p>Members of the Board of Directors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaristo José Abril Domingo. Rector of the University of Valladolid - Alfonso Murillo Villar. Rector of the University of Burgos - Urbano González Santos. President of the Social Council. University of León - Salvador Sánchez-Terán Hernández. President of the Social Council. University of Salamanca - Cristina Gredilla Cordero. Director of the Citizens' Affairs and Quality of Services Office in Castilla y León - Fernando Vallelado Prieto. General Treasurer at the Regional Treasury Ministry
Break		

Site-visit programme for the OAQ-coordinated external review of ACSUCYL

S7	11.30 – 12.30	<p>Representatives of the HEIs of Castilla y León</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cristina Guillarte Martín-Calero. Vice-chancellor of Quality Assurance at the University of Valladolid - Isabel Suárez González. Vice-chancellor of Quality Assurance at the University of Salamanca - Aránzazu Mendía Jalón. Vice-chancellor of Quality Assurance at the University of Burgos - José Carlos Redondo Castán. Vice-chancellor of Quality Assurance at the University of León. - Antonio de Castro Carpeño. Director of Quality Assurance at the IE University - Juan Vicente García Manjón. Vice-chancellor of the European Area and Employment at the UEMC University
S8	12.30 – 13.30	<p>Representatives from ANECA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gemma Rauret Dalmau. Director of ANECA - Elena Tejedor Viñuela. Director of ACSUCYL
	13.30 – 15.00	Review panel lunch: ACSUCYL Premises
S9	15.00 – 16.15	<p>Advisory Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Miguel Ángel Quintanilla Fisac. President of the Advisory Board - Guy Haug. Member of the Advisory Board - Benjamín Suárez Arroyo. Member of the Advisory Board - José Ginés Mora Ruíz. Member of the Advisory Board

Site-visit programme for the OAQ-coordinated external
review of ACSUCYL

S10	16.15 - 17.30	<p>Experts in assessment procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gaspar Roselló Nicolau. Expert in quality assessment procedures - José Joaquín Mira Solves. Expert in quality assessment procedures - Antonio Campos Muñoz. Expert in research and degree assessment procedures - Guillermo Martínez Massanet. Expert in research and degree assessment procedures - David Lopez Fernández. Student involved in evaluation processes in ACSUCYL - Sigfrido Martín Iglesias. Student involved in evaluation processes in ACSUCYL
	17.30 - 19.00	Review Panel meeting / discussion
	19.30 -	<p>Social Program. City tour around Valladolid.</p> <p>Review panel dinner:</p> <p>Name: Restaurante Los Zagales Address: C/ Pasión, 13 Tel +34 983 380 892 Website: www.loszagales.com</p>

Site-visit programme for the OAQ-coordinated external
review of ACSUCYL

Day 3: Friday 2 October

Session	Time	Group
S12	8.30 – 9.30	Extra meeting (if necessary to clarify something with any person)
	9.30 – 12.45	Review panel meeting: preparation of the preliminary oral report with the results of the external peer-review and first basic draft of the external review report, etc.
	12.45 – 13.15	Preliminary oral report with the results of the external peer-review
S13	13.30 – 15.30	Review Panel lunch Name: Restaurante Santi (El Caballo de Troya) Address: C/ Correos, 1 Tel +34 983 339 355
	15.30	End of site-visit and departure of Review Panel members

Annex 2 – Recommendations of ENQA

1. ACSUCYL does not engage student involvement in assessment panels.
2. The Agency should publish not only the outcomes of the assessments but also the assessment reports, thus endowing the process with greater transparency.
3. ENQA recommends clarification as to whether visits are conducted to the institutes responsible for the projects submitted for assessment for the purpose of carrying follow-up.
4. The board of directors should include a greater number of stakeholders involved in higher education. Furthermore experts should act with total independence. The commissions influence in final decisions should be clarified.
5. ENQA feels that the Agency's internal feedback mechanisms should be used more frequently and in a more organised manner.
6. The appeals system should be clarified.
7. ENQA notes there is a lack of any formal follow-up procedure for the assessment of postgraduate programmes.