



Agencia Andaluza del Conocimiento
CONSEJERÍA DE ECONOMÍA Y CONOCIMIENTO

ENQA Agency Review 2014 FOLLOW-UP REPORT

DIRECCIÓN DE EVALUACIÓN Y ACREDITACIÓN

Versión 1 - September 2016



Agencia Andaluza del Conocimiento
CONSEJERÍA DE ECONOMÍA Y CONOCIMIENTO

Dear ENQA Board members,

As director of the Direction of Assessment and Accreditation of the Andalusian Agency of Knowledge (AAC-DEVA), it is a pleasure for me to address you for reporting about the activities developed for our Agency in the light of the recommendations contained in the ENQA external report, issued in September 2014.

In 2009, AAC-DEVA gained full membership in ENQA, since then AAC-DEVA has aligned their evaluations activities in accordance with the Standard and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). However, quality assurance is not an act but rather an ongoing process in which feedback is a key player. In this regard, I would like to thank the recommendations of the ENQA-appointed panel for help us to improve our strategies and results as a quality assurance agency.

AAC-DEVA is a regional agency that it would like to effectively contribute to Andalusia's socioeconomic growth, through the enhancement of the quality of Higher education Andalusian system. To this end, AAC-DEVA will continue improving its evaluation methods and procedures, in accordance with ESG.

Yours Sincerely,

Francisco Gracia-Navarro

Director of AAC-DEVA



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Introduction

In drawing up this report AAC-DEVA has taken into account the observations and recommendations of the ENQA-appointed Panel, which were based on the 2005 version of the ESG. In some cases, where appropriate and feasible, attempts have been made to update the recommendations in accordance with the new version approved in 2015.

The ENQA external evaluation report, issued in June 2014, came to the following conclusions regarding AAC-DEVA's compliance with the ESG.

CRITERION	COMPLIANCE
ENQA Criterion 1 / ESG 3.1 / ESG Part 2: Use of external quality assurance processes	
ESG 2.1: Use of Internal Quality Assurance Procedures	Fully compliant
ESG 2.2: Development of External Quality Assurance Process	Fully compliant
ESG 2.3: Criteria for Decisions	Fully compliant
ESG 2.4: Processes Fit for Purpose	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.5: Reporting	Fully compliant
ESG 2.6: Follow-Up Procedures	Fully compliant
ESG 2.7: Periodic Reviews	Fully compliant
ESG 2.8: System-Wide Analysis	Substantially compliant
ENQA Criterion 1 / ESG 3.3 Summary of findings	
ENQA Criterion 1/ ESG 3.3: Activities	Fully compliant
ENQA criterion 2 / ESG 3.2: Official status	Fully compliant
ENQA criterion 3 / ESG 3.4: Resources	Fully compliant
ENQA criterion 4 / ESG 3.5: Mission statement	Fully compliant
ENQA criterion 5 / ESG 3.6: Independence	Fully compliant
ENQA Criterion 6 / ESG 3.7: External QA criteria and processes used by the agency	Fully compliant

ENQA Criterion 7 / ESG 3.8: Accountability procedures	Partially compliant
ENQA Criterion 8 / Miscellaneous	Fully compliant

The report also stated: “In the light of the documentary and oral evidence, the panel’s overall appreciation regarding the compliance of AAC-DEVA with ENQA membership criteria is positive. All stakeholders were unanimous as to their satisfaction with the way AAC-DEVA operates.

As usual, in order to elaborate a fair evaluation it is essential to be aware of the particular context of the Agency. Two contextual facts were particularly relevant in this case:

The programme accreditation process (one of the key processes that have been analysed in order to judge compliance) is heavily regulated at the Spanish level. The main features of the procedure as well as the items that should be taken into consideration are given. In consequence, the degree of independence of AAC-DEVA is somehow limited. This is a common feature of all Spanish agencies. However, the panel was confident that, to the extent they are allowed by the regulations in force, AAC-DEVA is acting in a professional and independent way.

At the moment of conducting this external evaluation, the complete ex-ante accreditation/follow up/ex-post accreditation cycle had not yet been fully implemented at the Spanish and Andalusian level. The ex-ante accreditation and follow-up stages were fully implemented but no programme accreditation processes (and consequently, no site visits) had yet been conducted. The panel could judge on the compliance with ESG 2.7 (periodic reviews) and ESG 3.7 (external quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies) thanks to the detailed information provided by AAC-DEVA on the way the first site visits will take place”.

The panel also addressed the following recommendations to the Agency:

1. AAC-DEVA should make sure that the programmes accreditation process and specifically, the new accreditation stage are able to **foster real enhancement** and contribute to the goals set for the Andalusian region: employability and enhanced institutional accountability.

In the process of accreditation of degrees, a number of aspects are taken into account in order to ensure that higher education contributes to improved employability in Andalusia and enhanced accountability for higher education institutions. As a first step in evaluating degree implementation, the quality of external practices is analysed. This analysis seeks to determine to what extent students conduct their external practices in industries or factories, in R & departments, in recognized university hospitals, in schools previously selected for their quality or in relevant institutions providing services to the community. As part of this analysis, quality monitoring by the academic tutor and professional tutor during practice is reviewed. To this end, practice guidelines are revised, and the

reports made by the students describing their internships, as well as the opinions of students and graduates, employers and tutors, are collected.

Second, during the visit to universities made as a part of the accreditation process, the quality of learning outcomes achieved is evaluated, taking into account the quality of the training received by students and graduates. This process includes, amongst other things, interviews with employers. During these interviews employers are asked about the skills acquired by students and are asked to determine: a) whether the skills demonstrated by students in external practices favor their employability; and, b) whether the skills acquired by graduates was a key factor in their recruitment, and whether they are satisfied with the training provided during undergraduate study.

Third, an analysis is made of graduate employment and employability, using data drawn from studies of graduate labour market outcomes and employability made by the university. Analysis of this data focuses not only on the percentage of graduates obtaining jobs, but also on the quality of the jobs obtained. For this purpose, analysis seeks to determine to what extent the job obtained is linked to the degree course studied, and whether the scale of the post occupied by the graduate corresponds to the academic qualifications obtained. Moreover, whenever possible, comparisons are made between the level of correspondence achieved by graduates from University X with degree Y and those achieved by graduates with a similar degree Y' from University Z.

2. The current calendar involves an important number of site visits and the panel wonders whether this planning is **feasible in terms of delays and resources**. The panel noted that universities will be visited several times per year (i.e University of Seville will receive between 42 and 55 visits in the period 2014-2017) which will certainly impose a heavy burden on the HEIs. An additional challenge associated to this scheme is avoid losing the **global view of a given institution** and to ensure consistency along the different site visits. AAC-DEVA should carefully consider these issues.

The state of the art described in this recommendation reflects the Spanish government approach to evaluation and accreditation processes. After eight years, in June 2015, the Spanish government itself issued a new regulation that marks a substantial change in strategy. Royal Decree 420/2015 provides for accreditation of programmes using an institutional approach, thus shifts the focus of accreditation from the programmes themselves to the schools and universities teaching them. In that sense, Royal Decree 420/2015 may be regarded as being in alignment with this recommendation by the ENQA panel.

AAC-DEVA is designing an institutional accreditation programme, with a view to complying with the ENQA panel's the recommendation and with the regulation

issued by the he Spanish government. This accreditation programme aims to align the evaluation of teachers, programmes and research around a centre or university. The purpose of the new programme is to generate positive synergies between the research carried out in an institution and the teaching provided by that institution, taking into account the quality of the teaching and the contribution made by the centre or university to Andalusian society. The core of the institutional accreditation programme design by AAC-DEVA is the internal quality assurance system in force within an institution, since this system underpins the ongoing improvement of programmes, faculty, research and the transfer of knowledge to society.

Through this comprehensive approach, the institutional accreditation programme seeks to reduce both the number of visits and the continuous demands made by AAC-DEVA on centres and universities. Similarly, the programme of institutional accreditation will provide institutions with a comprehensive external review that will help them form an overall picture of the quality of their activities and their staff, opposed to the fragmented vision that resulting from the previous approach.

AAC-DEVA has established an expert committee made up of academics, professionals, students and other stakeholders. The committee will listen to the views of universities and social partners with a view to developing a proposal for institutional accreditation. Given the importance and significance of this shift in the evaluation and accreditation processes implemented to date, AAC-DEVA in contact with other Spanish agencies which are implementing similar initiatives.

3. The panel encourages AAC-DEVA to reflect on the way the **selection of experts** is done and the registers of AAC-DEVA's expert data base are updated so as to capitalize on its full potential.

AAC-DEVA is aware of the problem described above and has adopted in all its evaluation activities, measures consistent with this recommendation. The measures adopted focus on several issues.

- a) Recruitment and appointment of experts via expressions of interest published on the AAC-DEVA website.
- b) Regular renewal of the panels of experts using systematic procedures published on the AAC-DEVA website.
- c) Integration of existing AAC-DEVA databases (programmes, faculty, and research projects) into a single database.

The selection and appointment of experts for programme evaluation is carried out according to a new procedure approved by AAC-DEVA's Technical Committee ([Procedure of selection](#)). The new procedure calls for an expression of interest from

individuals interested in taking part in AAC-DEVA evaluation procedures. Applicants are then selected or rejected on the basis of the criteria defined in that procedure. Once appointed, experts are required to take part in a training process adapted to the kind of evaluation in which they will be involved. Half the panel members are renewed every three years, so that half the panel members were renewed in July 2016. Moreover, AAC-DEVA staff monitor the experts' activities in order to improve their quality assurance skills.

The selection and appointment of experts for evaluating R&D projects similarly begins with an enquiry or expression of interest ([Expression of interest](#)). Using this procedure, 16 coordinators were selected from enquiries received. Enquiries were also received from 2500 non-Andalusian researchers who make up the 16 committees covering 9 Scientific Technical Areas through which the Andalusian Knowledge System is structured.

Six expert committees are responsible for the assessment of teaching staff. These committees represent the various knowledge areas (Science, Social Sciences, Enginry, Architecture, Humanities, Health) in which Andalusian teaching staff is evaluated prior to appointment. All members of expert committees are renewal every three years. The complaints panel is also renewed in accordance with the same procedure. In each renewal process, new experts are drawn from the expert database. This committee is published on the AAC-DEVA at: ([Committee](#)).

4. The panel recommends that the process of **selection of student** experts is revised. The fact that the student expert selection procedure is completely open could lead to some problems (i.e. students could be pointed out in advanced and be encouraged to apply, which would pervert the selection process). Additionally, the panel considered that the Council of Students could provide some support to the agency in order to improve the selection and training of student experts.

AAC-DEVA has always operated a procedure an expert selection procedure which is open to students. The current student selection procedure reflects the underdeveloped nature of existing student associations in Andalusia at: ([Procedure of selection](#)). The panel's recommendation seems eminently appropriate, and students' associations will henceforth be formally asked to propose potential candidates to take part in our quality assurance processes. In any case, candidates proposed will have to apply to participate in the process and meet expert selection procedure. We will also invite suggestions from students' associations, and to this end will call a meeting in November 2016, with a view to improving our student selection process. Similarly, in December 2017 we have scheduled a specific training seminar for all students participating in the ex-ante evaluations, follow-up and accreditation processes.

5. The panel welcomes the fact that students are represented in AAC-DEVA's government bodies (AAC advisory board and AAC-DEVA's Technical Commission). It is also aware of the fact that the Technical Commission is not yet fully functional and encourages AAC-DEVA to remain vigilant and **ensure that the student representative is really treated as an equal**.

Students involved in the AAC-DEVA advisory board and AAC-DEVA's Technical Commission are really treated as equals. They perform the same functions and carry out the same kind of activities as other members. They have access to the same information and evidence. Students are free to ask questions and their views recommendations receive the same consideration as those of other members of the board or commission. Students' members of AAC-DEVA's Technical Commission meet, like all members, once per term. Before each meeting, they receive an annotated agenda containing all the documents to be reviewed.

6. Regarding the **use of international experts**, the panel acknowledges the practical difficulties associated with recruiting and training this kind of experts. However, it considers that additional efforts should be invested to this regard, as introducing international expertise brings in important benefits in terms of introduction of an international perspective, exchange of practices and avoidance of conflict of interest.

In the light of this ENQA recommendation, AAC-DEVA has instituted a call for enquiries or expressions of interest on the part of international experts (academics, professionals and students) who are fluent in Spanish and are interested in taking part in programme and institutional evaluations or teachers' assessments. In particular, AAC-DEVA has extended the call for enquiries to universities in France, Portugal and Morocco where more people have Spanish as a second language.

The major difficulty that AAC-DEVA faces when seeking to routinely incorporate international experts in evaluation programmes is that the applications developed by both Spanish and Andalusian governments are in Spanish. Therefore in the R&D project evaluations, international experts can be included as panel members only if they speak fluent Spanish or if they focus only on international R & D projects co-funded by the Spanish government. This is particularly the case for Talentia Post-Doc programmes and Talent-Hub, for which AAC-DEVA has a database of 48 international experts with experience in research evaluation, who speak both English and Spanish. A total of 30 international experts took part in the three calls published (10 international experts / call; 1/3 of total experts in each of Talentia Post-Doc, I-Hub Talent and Talent-Hub II committees) for the recruitment of doctors. Currently, AAC-DEVA is committed to the evaluation of 8 pre-doctoral contracts subsidized by the NanoMedPhD-COFUND programme, funded by the Government of Andalusia and the European Union in the area of Nanomedicine that will be evaluated by international experts.

7. As the whole accreditation cycle is not yet implemented, it was not clear to the panel whether a **follow-up after the first accreditation phase** is intended. Introducing such a follow-up phase would be consistent with the spirit of the ESG. The panel recommends to AAC-DEVA to consider this issue in consultation with the rest of Spanish agencies and the National and Regional Governments.

Under Spanish law, the accreditation cycle comprises several phases: an ex-ante accreditation, a follow-up process that results in one or more follow-up reports, an ex-post accreditation, a new follow-up process focusing on those degrees required to implement recommendations affecting key aspects of teaching performance and the achievement of learning outcomes. In the light of the recommendation contained in the ENQA Follow-up Report, AAC-DEVA has formally requested the Spanish Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (Spanish acronym REACU) to analyze how a follow-up process could be implemented after the first phase of accreditation. AAC-DEVA's proposal has been included in the agenda for the REACU meeting to be held in Alicante on 25 November 2016. At that meeting, any agreement on how to implement follow-up after the first phase of accreditation will be referred to the National and Regional Governments.

8. The panel appreciates the efforts made by the agency in order to produce annual reports and **meta-analysis** of its multiple activities. However, the panel considers that more work could be done in order to increase AAC-DEVA's contribution to system-wide analysis. In particular, the panel recommends the preparation of a publication devoted to the current state and trends of the quality assurance system in Andalusia which will enable AAC-DEVA to profit from the rich and abundant information gathered after the first verification and follow-up rounds. In consistency with the results of the 2009 AAC-DEVA review, the panel believes that further opportunities for cross-regional studies in collaboration with other Spanish quality assurance agencies could be explored.

AAC-DEVA conducts a Meta-analysis of its evaluations which takes into account the opinions of stakeholders and the evaluation panel as well as the results of evaluation. As a consequence of those review processes, AAC-DEVA produces annual reports regarding the process and the outcome of ex-ante evaluations ([ex-ante evaluations annual report](#)), follow-up ([follow-up annual report](#)) and accreditation ([pilot accreditation report](#)). They also include actions aimed at improving the evaluation in the next cycle (see Recommendation 9).

AAC-DEVA also carries out an ongoing review process of its teaching staff evaluation activities in order to bring them into a line with ESG 2015. Accordingly, AAC-DEVA takes into account opinions from applicants as well as experts involved

in AAC-DEVA's evaluation procedures. Annually, AAC-DEVA reports on the quality of teaching staff evaluation based on the analysis of strengths and weakness identified in anonymous questionnaires. In the light of these analyses, AAC-DEVA adopts measures to improve evaluation procedures and results. 2015 Report is available at: ([Quality of teaching staff report](#)).

AAC-DEVA, in conjunction with the other agencies belonging to the Spanish university system conducts a Meta-analysis, based on the results of evaluations of programmes, teaching and research institutions, research projects and faculty. The results of this Meta-analysis were last published in the 2014 Report on Quality in Higher Education available at: ([Spanish university system report](#)). There is a draft version of the 2015 Report on Quality in Higher Education.

9. AAC-DEVA should operate its **Internal Quality Assurance system** in a more formal and documented way in order to ensure that continuous improvement is actually implemented. The results of the different satisfaction surveys should be formally considered. The impact of the improvement initiatives adopted should be assessed in order to ensure that continuous improvement is actually taking place. The panel understands and appreciates the value of lean quality approaches, however, some written records should be found on this improvement process, based on an annual SWOT assessment of the agency's practice. Additionally, the panel recommends the introduction of formal feedback mechanisms addressed to the staff of the Agency.

Since the ENQA panel visit, AAC-DEVA has sought to make its system of quality assurance more effective. To this end, AAC-DEVA has revised its assessment processes in all areas of activities.

In 2014, AAC-DEVA carried out a pilot accreditation of programmes, which assessed 20 programmes implemented at 9 universities Andalusian. The review of the process and the results obtained in this pilot scheme identified strengths and weaknesses at: ([Pilot Accreditation report](#)). This information was very useful for drafting the guidelines and assessment protocols that have been in use since 2015 in the accreditation of degree programmes and of 120 Master's Degree programmes run by Andalusian universities. Similarly, the weaknesses and strengths identified in the pilot study were borne in mind in the training of evaluators taking part in the panels' accreditation programme.

Following the recommendation of the ENQA panel, after each call for verification ([ex-ante evaluation report](#)), and monitoring ([follow-up report](#)), reports are being produced covering both results and satisfaction. Each of these reports concludes with a summary of steps to be taken at the next call. These measures have been agreed at different stages of the process via face to face and virtual meetings and systems designed to collect system-specific information targeted at different

stakeholders: academics, students and professionals ([guidelines for universities](#)), ([Agreement 1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)).

AAC-DEVA has taken specific steps to improve quality verification, monitoring and accreditation reports as recommended in the ENOA report at: ([Degree on Business Administration Report](#)), ([Degree on Law Report](#)). Measures have been aimed at providing better foundations and motivations for evaluations, ensuring that the arguments put forward by experts are more comprehensive and detailed. AAC-DEVA has also developed and coordinated double and triple reading measures for correcting and reviewing reports. AAC-DEVA has appointed second-order coordinators responsible for evaluation the quality of reports and measuring their adaptation to the style manual.

In order to improve experts' access to evidence, AAC-DEVA has implemented measures to improve the computerized management system, replacing the storage of reports in *pdf* format by a more dynamic, versatile and flexible application for managing stored information and for the cross-sectional analysis of that information. This has been associated with the differentiation between qualitative and numerical indicators in terms agreed with other agencies ([Doctorate report](#)).

Annually updated guidelines are produced, incorporating the observations, suggestions and results of the meta-evaluation of each programme. The latest update covers the 2015 ESG.

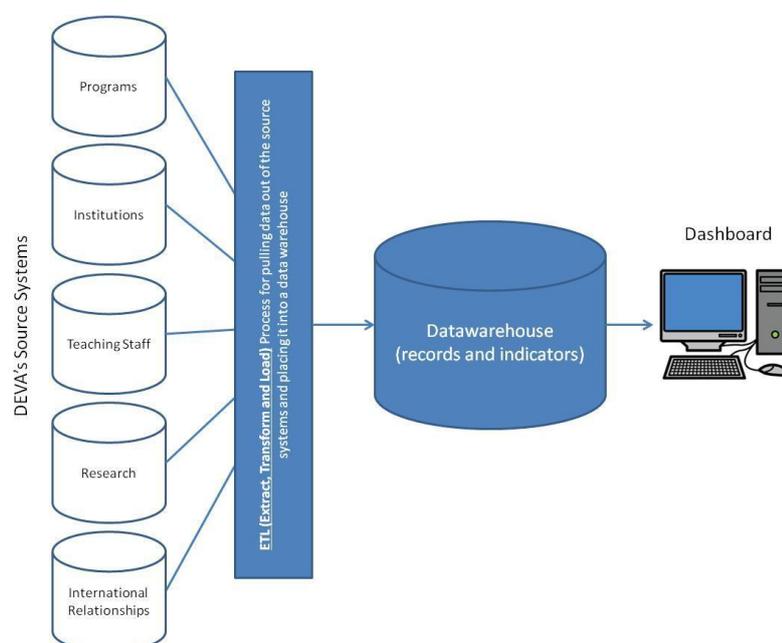
With regard to committee working procedures, AAC-DEVA has reviewed the decision-making, structure, placing greater emphasis on organizing face-to-face meetings with a view to enhancing discussion and seeking internal consensus within committees on the various items and criteria evaluated by strengthening collegiate decisions in each evaluation. It has also increased the number of meetings organized to reach agreement within and between committees.

Similarly, AAC-DEVA has established a review procedure aimed at ensuring the technical quality control of reports via setting-up of a report review commission. The role of this commission, which is made of the presidents of each of the branches of knowledge (Science, Social Sciences, Health, Architecture and Engineering, Arts and Humanities) is to filter errors; to ensure that information arguments and evaluations are placed under the appropriate criteria and to reduced variability in the application of criteria and guidelines. This has led to greater uniformity in styles of reporting, and to the production of a Style Manual exemplifying good and bad practices in the drafting of evaluation reports ([instructions for committees](#)). In teaching staff evaluations, several measures have been taken to ensure the internal quality of AAC-DEVA's performance. An Appeals Committee comprising one member from each of the branches of knowledge studies all those measures adopted brought by applicants following a negative evaluation. Regular meetings have been held with the chairmen of the committees to exchange ideas and to detect good and bad practices in the drafting of minutes

and collection of the resolutions adopted, all focused on improving the quality of the teacher accreditation process.

One weakness of AAC-DEVA's internal quality assurance system is the fragmentation of information stored in different databases. To address this issue, AAC-DEVA is currently working to develop a data warehouse as a system to be used for reporting and data analysis. This will act as a central repository for integrated data, records and key indicators from different sources. The system will store current and historical data.

The data stored in the warehouse relating to programmes, institutions, teaching staff and research would be uploaded from operational systems as shown in the figure below.



- Concerning the international activities of AAC-DEVA, the panel recommends that an **international strategy** is clearly defined which is consistent with AAC-DEVA's mission and available resources.

AAC-DEVA has designed an international strategy based on four milestones. First, enhancing AAC-DEVA collaboration with quality assurance agencies and higher European institutions focusing on quality assurance processes; those projects involve AAC-DEVA's participation in evaluation activities in other countries, and vice versa. A good example of this collaboration is the agreement between AAC-DEVA and AKKORK in Russian universities. As the result of an agreement with AKKORK, in 2016 AAC-DEVA has been involved in the accreditation of Bachelor's

Degree programmes at the People's Friendship University of Russia (PFUR). Moreover, in 2017 AAC-DEVA will extend that process to PFUR Master's Degrees. This accreditation process examines whether and to what extent AAC-DEVA quality requirements are being satisfied, taking into account national and international standards.

Second, also in collaboration with quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions, AAC-DEVA will promote or take part in research projects focusing on the relationships between learning quality and research quality.

Third, improving the skills of AAC-DEVA's staff as a way of enhancing the international perspective of quality in the evaluation activities they carry out. This training activity is especially important in emerging areas of evaluation. Accordingly, in 2015 AAC-DEVA held the 5th ENQA Member's forum (16-17 April) and in 2016 AAC-DEVA's staff will take part in the event "Social dimension of e-learning-Addressing challenges through QA" (Athens, 12-13 December). Hosted by AAC-DEVA in 2017, AAC-DEVA's staff will be involved in a monographic seminar on QA of the mixture of MOOC, blended and online programmes.

Four, extending our activities to other quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions outside Europe. Because of Andalusia geographical location and historical roots, America and the Maghreb are two regions of special interest for AAC-DEVA. In 2014 AAC-DEVA has signed an agreement with the Chile's Agencia de Acreditación y Evaluación de la Educación Superior ACREDITACION (<http://www.acreditacion.cl/>). Under that agreement, AAC-DEVA and ACREDITACION undertake to collaborate each other's evaluation programmes. Similarly, collaboration has started with International Euroarabic University (Spanish initials UIEA,) in order to develop accreditation processes in Morocco.

Conclusions

AAC-DEVA wishes to conclude this follow-up report by thanking the ENQA Secretariat and Board and the Panel that conducted the evaluation visit. AAC-DEVA gained ENQA membership in 2000, and since then AAC-DEVA has been involved in a constant review of strategic issues relating to its own goals and objectives. ENQA membership has had an impact in terms of improving the quality assurance activities of the Agency. The two external reviews in which we have engaged, together our participation in seminars and working groups have provided us with a rich feedforward. While aware that this is in some ways a complex art, we are convinced that we are collaborating with all the Andalusian stakeholders to ensure that the "culture of Quality" is the method used by higher education institutions in a continuous improvement cycle focusing on training and R & D activities. Given the nature of the Agency and the characteristics of the region where it is located, we must work hard to make sure that quality assurance activities are

both efficient and useful, and that they promote equality in our society. To achieve this, accountability processes should be supplemented by others processes involving assurance and enhancement activities. As a quality assurance Agency, we are constantly aware of our responsibility to support social cohesion and economic growth as well as cultural development in Andalusia.

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