



AGENTUR FÜR  
QUALITÄTSSICHERUNG DURCH  
AKKREDITIERUNG VON  
STUDIENGÄNGEN E.V.

EXPERTS' REPORT

# INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

Universidad Autónoma de Chile (Chile)

August 2021



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## Decision of the AQAS Commission

on the institutional review of

### Universidad Autónoma de Chile (Chile)

**Based on the report of the expert panel and the discussions of the AQAS Commission in its 10<sup>th</sup> meeting on 30 August 2021, the AQAS Commission decides:**

1. The **Universidad Autónoma de Chile (Chile)** is accredited according to the AQAS criteria for Institutional Accreditation.

The accreditation is conditional.

The University essentially complies with the requirements defined by the criteria and thus the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in their current version. The required adjustments can be implemented within a time period of twelve months.

2. The conditions have to be fulfilled. The fulfilment of the conditions has to be documented and reported to AQAS no later than **30 September 2022**. The confirmation of the conditions might include a physical site visit within the time period of twelve months.
3. The accreditation is given for the period of **six years** and is valid until **30 September 2027**.

#### Condition:

1. UAC must improve the communication of actions taken based on the PDCA cycle to the relevant stakeholders to increase acceptance and ownership of the QA cycle.

The following **recommendations** are given for further improvement of the programmes:

1. UAC might consider strengthening research systematically by including regionally focused topics connected with applied research that are relevant to its surrounding communities.
2. Fostering student mobility between campuses should be a consideration in the future as well as the continuation of select digital courses even in a post-COVID environment.
3. The staff development strategy of UAC should be further developed to increase the possibilities for UAC teaching staff members to acquire a PhD degree – an option could be to offer PhD-programmes at UAC.
4. Policies should be implemented to assure progress in the development of English proficiency of staff and students to support a better exchange with non-Spanish speaking universities on the one hand, and to expand their research activities with non-Spanish speaking countries on the other hand.

With regard to the reasons for this decision the Standing Commission refers to the attached assessment report.

**EXPERTS' REPORT  
ON THE INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION  
OF UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE CHILE (CHILE)**

Visit to the university: 31 May – 4 June 2021

**Panel of Experts:**

<b>Prof. Dr. Jan Ehlers</b>	University Witten/Herdecke (Germany), Vice-President for Teaching and Learning
<b>Prof. Dr. Jon Irazusta Astiazaran</b>	University of the Basque Country (Spain), Director of the Department of Physiology at Faculty of Medicine and Odontology
<b>Prof. Dr. Andrea Kaplan</b>	University of Buenos Aires (Argentina), School of Dentistry, Department for Dental Materials
<b>Dr. Patricio Ricardo Rodríguez Bastías</b>	Dentistry Coordinator at SanaSalud (Santiago de Chile/Chile) (representative from the labour market)
<b>Dominik Kubon</b>	Student of RWTH Aachen University (Germany) (student expert)
<b>Coordinators:</b> Patrick Heinzer / Ronny Heintze	AQAS, Cologne, Germany

## II. Preamble

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AQAS – Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes – is an independent non-profit organisation supported by more than 90 member institutions, higher education institutions (HEIs) and academic associations. Since 2002, the agency has been accredited by the German Accreditation Council (GAC). It is, therefore, a notified body for the accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes in Germany.

AQAS is a full member of ENQA and also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) which confirms that our procedures comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), on which all Bologna countries agreed as a basis for internal and external quality assurance.

AQAS is an institution founded by and working for higher education institutions and academic associations. The agency is devoted to quality assurance and quality development of academic studies and teaching in Higher Education Institutions. The activities of AQAS in accreditation are neither restrained to specific academic disciplines or degrees nor a particular type of Higher Education Institution.

## III. Accreditation procedure

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This report results from the external institutional review of Universidad Autónoma de Chile (Chile).

### *Approach and methodology*

Within the institutional accreditation procedure by AQAS, the quality assurance system of a university, faculty, or college is assessed against the AQAS criteria for institutional accreditation, which are aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG, version 2015). The ESG are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. The ESG are non-prescriptive while providing guidance and covering the vital areas for the successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education.

In line with the ESG the AQAS criteria for institutional accreditation are based on the following four principles for quality assurance:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance,
- Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students,
- Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture,
- Quality assurance considers the needs and expectations of students and all other stakeholders and society.

AQAS developed a set of criteria and indicators relevant for institutional accreditations. Based on these accreditation criteria, AQAS also provided the university with guidelines for writing a self-evaluation report (SER). AQAS follows the core idea that it should be assessed if the mechanisms the institution chose to secure the quality of its study programmes are appropriate within an external assessment. Therefore, AQAS focuses on the overarching mechanisms to secure an adequate level of the learning process of Higher Education Institutions. Beyond this, the aims formulated by the university in the SER have an impact on the assessment of the panel of experts as applications need to be seen in the light of the strategic goals of the institution. In the accreditation procedures, AQAS follows the peer-review principle. Based on AQAS' long-lasting experience

with external quality assurance procedures and its involvement in international networks when working with experts, AQAS acts according to the ECA Principles for the Selection of Experts.

#### *Internal Phase/Basis for the assessment of the panel of experts*

Universidad Autónoma de Chile delivered a SER describing the main characteristics of the institution. The SER explained how the quality management system works and how learning and teaching are organised. Additionally, Universidad Autónoma de Chile sent appendices to provide more detailed material, give evidence to the self-report statements, and demonstrate how procedures are organised and put into practice.

The appendix included documents such as student retention rates, UAC educational offers, undergraduate teaching and undergraduate admission regulations, quality assurance policies and mechanisms, information on graduate profiles, or procedures for drafting and updating study plans.

AQAS scrutinised the application originally received in early 2021 for sufficiency so that the final version of the SER was delivered in April 2021.

#### *External phase/panel of experts*

Following the AQAS principles for institutional accreditation, the composition followed the basic principle that the panel consists of two experts from university management/from one of the disciplines offered by the higher education institution under review, one expert for quality assurance/labour market and, one student expert. At least one panel member has experience in the region.

On 17 February 2020, the AQAS Commission officially initialised the procedure.

AQAS informed the university about the expert panel members, and Universidad Autónoma de Chile had no objections.

Within the institutional accreditation procedure, the study programme "Dentistry" was chosen to be reviewed and serve as a programme sample for the institutional review. An additional SER provided the necessary information on the programme sample following the guidelines for AQAS programme reviews as UAC chose to extend the programme sample to a full programme review.

The experts reviewed the application and submitted a short preliminary statement, including open questions and potential needs for additional information. AQAS forwarded these preliminary statements to the university and the other panel members to increase transparency in the process and the discussions during the site visit.

Due to the travel restrictions during the Covid-19 crisis, the site visit was held digitally. During the site visit, discussions were held with the university management, the QA unit, the Deans of the faculties, teaching staff, students, and labour market representatives. At the end of the site visit, the experts presented short feedback on the main findings to representatives of Universidad Autónoma de Chile. The experts highlighted the constructive atmosphere of the discussion and underline that generally, all aspects could be discussed in the virtual format. At the same time, the experts believe that fully understanding some of the particularities and the fine lines that could be explained as "institutional style" in implementing the processes can hardly be assessed in a virtual surrounding in full. Even more, the experts hope that their observations will be helpful for the institution and can be applied in the particular context of UAC.

In June and July 2021, the expert panel drafted the assessment report, including a recommendation to the Standing Commission of AQAS. AQAS forwarded the report to UAC, providing the opportunity to comment on the report.

Based upon the expert panel's report and the University's comments, the AQAS Commission decided on the institutional accreditation. AQAS forwarded the decision to the University. The University had the right to appeal the decision.

AQAS published the report and the result of the accreditation and the names of the panel of experts.

#### IV. National context

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Education in Chile is organised in four levels: Pre-school, Primary (8 years); Secondary (4 years); and Higher Education. Higher Education Institutions in Chile include 61 universities, 42 Professional Institutes, and 47 Technical Training Centres that focus on technical/vocational programmes (2-4 years duration). Total enrolment in HEIs is close to 1,250,000 students, approximately 60% of the population aged 18 to 24.

Most universities are organised in Faculties (*Facultades*), in turn comprising Schools and/or Departments, and there may also be Centres and Institutes that carry out studies or research in specific areas. University governance generally includes a Management Board (*Directorio* or *Junta Directiva*); a Rector (or *Presidente*) and Cabinet (Vice-Rectors and other leaders); an Academic or Higher Council (comprised of Faculty Deans and other senior officers); and directors of sectoral units (Schools, Departments, Centres, Institutes) in addition to central support units (Instruction, Post-graduate, Student Affairs, Personnel, Institutional Research, Admission, Library, and other services).

Universities award degrees enabling the practice of a profession (Physician – Surgeon, Engineer, Veterinary Surgeon, Pharmaceutical Chemist, Nurse, Psychologist, Journalist, Architect, etc.); which implies programme lasting 5-7 years, usually in the fourth year awarding a License Academic degree (similar to a Bachelors). The License degree and/or the professional degree allow continuing-on to graduate programmes (Masters', Doctorate) and medical or dental specialisation.

Under the law, Chilean universities are non-profit institutions. In general, the sources of financing are the fees paid by students, competitive funds (research and development of teaching), donations, sale of services, and a direct contribution by the State for the so-called public institutions and some private institutions.

A national accreditation system was initiated in 2003 and managed by *Comisión Nacional de Acreditación* (CNA-Chile) (National Commission for Accreditation). Accreditation is awarded at institutional and undergraduate programme level (leading to a professional degree), Masters', Doctoral, and medical and dental specialisation. Accreditation is mandatory for undergraduate programmes in Education, Medicine, and Dentistry. The National Education Council (CNED - *Consejo Nacional de Educación*) authorises new private institutions to operate and then oversees them until they are awarded the status of an institution with full autonomy or their closure is agreed.

#### V. General information on the University

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Universidad Autónoma de Chile (UAC) is a non-profit institution founded in Temuco in 1989 (as Universidad Autónoma de Sur). Starting with undergraduate degree programmes in Law and Commercial Engineering, the University expanded in 1993 in the Maule and the Metropolitan region and changed its name. The University points out that the direction of expansion (from regional towards the capital) was an exception within the Chilean Higher Education system because many universities in Chile expanded from the capital towards other regions. At the time of the SER, the university has 25,605 students and 2,160 academics. UAC now has four campuses located in three cities (Providencia Campus and El Llano Campus in Santiago de Chile, Talca and Temuco).

On a structural level and based on a university-wide regulation, the organisation of UAC is headed by a shareholder's board, a board of directors and the rector. The administrative organisation chart foresees the differentiation between a university council, an academic council and the general secretary. Following an

organisational principle of decentralisation, each campus has six vice-chancellors who share the academic and administrative responsibility (academic, administration and finance, graduate and research, public engagement, quality assurance, and the campus itself). As stated in the SER, UAC decided in 2008 to create faculties in order to be able to develop educational projects which respect the local needs of the academic and professional environment. Currently, UAC has established seven faculties (business and administration, architecture and construction, medical and health sciences, humanities and social science, law, education, engineering) which offer 32 undergraduate programmes.

## VI. Assessment of the Institution

### 1. Policy and Procedures for Quality Assurance

*Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. [ESG, 1.1]*

#### Description

In the SER, the Universidad Autónoma de Chile states that quality assurance is an integral part of the institutional strategic development plan for 2019-2023. In this context, quality assurance is associated with multiple dynamic means and measures required to enhance the necessary capacities to meet high-performance standards systematically. The primary responsibilities lie with (1) the Quality Assurance Vice-Chancellor Office, which is further divided into units for planning and studies, internal assessments, institutional analysis, and quality management, (2) the respective Quality Assurance Faculty Coordinators, who support planning, evaluation, and implementation procedures, and (3) the Faculty Quality Committees, in which relevant stakeholders monitor the processes and results of the internal QA system.

The internal quality assurance system described in the report intends to build a full PDCA cycle and focus on the systematisation of processes and strategies, the enhancement of said strategies, the monitoring of relevant stakeholders' satisfaction of needs, and transparency with regards to national and international regulations. It includes the following levels:

- The strategic level, which involves government regulations, internal evaluation, quality management and institutional analysis.
- The academic level, on which training programs for undergraduate and graduate students, academic body management, research and public engagement are both sources for the exploration of opportunities and subjects of reviews and adjustments.
- The support level, which includes finances, relevant stakeholders as well as necessary resources and infrastructure .

The University has identified five groups as relevant stakeholders whose feedback is collected regularly and implemented in the QA process, i.e. students, academic personnel, administrative personnel, graduates, and the labour market. The QA model described in the report involves five components, i.e. analysis, design, execution, evaluation, improvement, and four interactive systems (institutional planning, quality management, permanent evaluation, and institutional analysis). In addition, the University has defined 40 internal quality assurance processes concerning its different organisational levels, which are associated with defined mechanisms (e.g. council and committee meetings, surveys, and focus groups, amongst others) and linked to both internal and external stakeholders participation. Two central instruments of quality assurance are the Annual Reports and the Academic Audits. The Annual Reports are an internal instrument to achieve ongoing monitoring and evaluation of study programmes. This process is conducted by participants from all levels of the university (university, faculty, department) and closes with identifying improvement opportunities. The Academic Audits

are scheduled annually and involve internal stakeholders (such as the QA Vice-Chancellor, the Quality Management Department, and the Internal Evaluation Department, amongst others) and external evaluators who evaluate all programmes according to institutional, national and international criteria. The QA policy and the deliverables of the individual processes are explained to be communicated to stakeholders on the university website.

### **Experts' Evaluation**

The quality assurance system of UAC includes strategic processes, academic processes covering studies, teaching and research, and support processes, e.g. for the recruitment of personnel, and thus, in the opinion of the expert group, covers all performance areas of the University. The procedures are clearly defined, and the responsibilities are clearly regulated and adhere to best practice standards. A comprehensive policy for quality assurance covers all aspects regarding the University's understanding of quality assurance and quality enhancement.

The expert group is particularly impressed by the academic audits performed annually for all graduate and undergraduate programmes. This ensures that, on the one hand, the quality of the study programmes is closely monitored, and, on the other hand, external auditors are regularly involved in providing external input for the continuous optimization of the study programs. Additional internal personnel supplements the group of external peers for this kind of audits from another faculty of UAC. The university employs a high share of members qualified through an external European accreditation agency to review the study programmes and provide input for optimization based on the criteria of evaluation of the Chilean accreditation commission. From the experts point of view, this is an outstanding practice that also underlines the intention for continuous improvement.

Even though the system currently consists of 40 processes, some of which are interconnected, the experts are impressed by the level of detail the processes are described and visualised through flow charts. In order to maintain an overview of the complex QA system, further documents on the integration of the processes into the overall QA system and a user manual on the processes are maintained by the Quality Assurance Vice-Chancellor Office that are also helpful in providing new employees and interested parties with all relevant information about the QA system. Despite the informative self-evaluation report and the detailed discussions during the virtual site visit, the panel required intense exchange to grasp all IQAS processes' complexity and implementation. Due to the multitude of processes, the extent to which process management is established, how the overview of ongoing process steps are managed at the institutional and the faculty level, and how the process records are managed are hard to understand for an outsider, particularly understanding to which extend these processes are filled with life and contribute to an institutional culture of quality. The required processes are there, and evidence for their implementation was provided. Central units and staff are clearly doing well in running the processes and implementing the procedures. At the same time, UAC is a complex entity with many faculties and campuses, and filling such a comprehensive system with acceptance, support and demonstrating its added value across the board is challenging. Therefore, the expert panel believes that these aspects should also be covered as a part of a later confirmation visit.

The experts can confirm that the system itself is subject to a continuous review process and that the University's management assigns great importance to continuous optimization and possible rapid adaptation to new evolving conditions. Evidence for that is the continuous review and check of all IQAS processes by process auditing and the systematic review of all used questionnaires.

During the audit, the expert panel gained the impression that all stakeholders work together to offer ideal conditions for conducting high-quality study programmes and establishing more intensive research activities. In addition to the regular discussion formats and review steps already established by the QA system, all members of the university and the external representatives of the labour market are engaged in an ongoing

exchange, which in some cases even goes beyond the required formats. The expert panel was able to gain a good impression of the intensive involvement of the labour market regarding the degree programmes. The labour market representatives are very interested in a regular exchange about the study conditions and the contents of the curricula, which is reflected through regular surveys and discussions in the commissions in which they are also involved. Students are integrated into the University's committees, such as the faculty boards. In addition, there are teams of students who represent the programs and hold regular discussions with the respective dean's offices and program directors. The expert panel appreciate that the university has established a participatory culture of discussion with the help of which the quality enhancement aspects are coming into particular focus. The experts encourage the University to follow this path also in the future.

The different sites are a particular strength of the UAC, but it is also a challenge to implement and manage the study programmes equally well at all sites. The expert panel got the impression the QA system is applied at all sites of the University. With the help of the curriculum committees, which representatives of all campuses form, a harmonisation of the curriculum is achieved. The curriculum committee is also responsible for the execution of changes in programmes at all campuses. Weekly meetings between employees of every site ensure that the responsible persons can exchange information about the current situation at the four campuses. The experts have understood that the UAC strives to offer equally good study conditions at all four campuses. Through further extra-curricular but partly professional networking between the campuses, students and teachers are brought together. Furthermore, the transfer between the campuses has been simplified so that students can more easily change location in the middle of their studies, if necessary or desired.

The expert panel can confirm that the results of surveys are used intensively within the quality assurance system, but during the interviews, it appeared to the expert panel that knowledge about the implemented actions within the stakeholders differs a lot and – at least in some parts- was not there. Within such a well-thought and robust system, the experts are not surprised that the manifold and complex system and its outcomes can be challenging to share even with the key stakeholders. In particular, the results of surveys completed by students and the derived actions should be systematically communicated. Following the approach of the UAC to present a closed PDCA cycle, the experts positively conclude that there is good evidence and awareness and information for the PDC. It could also be demonstrated that UAC takes appropriate action based on the findings of its processes. However, as interviews have shown, knowledge about this must still be improved as otherwise, from an (internal) stakeholder perspective, it might seem that QA becomes a reason for creating extra workload while – particularly with the well-designed approach of UAC – it leads to continuous improvement. For this reason, the panel believes that UAC must improve the dissemination of its "Action" part of the PDCA cycle to increase the extent to which the system supports the development of a culture of continuous enhancement (**Finding 1**).

## Conclusion

This criterion is partially fulfilled.

## 2. Design and approval of programmes

*Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. [ESG, 1.2]*

## Description

As stated in the report, UAC has implemented a model for the design and approval of educational programmes that are based on three pillars:

- A focus is set on students' learning outcomes with regards to the acquisition of knowledge and the implementation and further development in relation to the professional field. Here, the student is regarded as an active participant in the learning process
- Interdisciplinary and transversal learning is encouraged in order to successfully connect subject-specific and experience-related learning. Following the educational model, this quality is located both on an institutional and a curricular level.
- A third pillar is to equip students with the ability of lifelong learning with regards to both professional and social competencies. Here, different types of learning (formal, non-formal, informal) are taken into account.

Following the institutional mission statement, social responsibility is highly valued and implemented on a university level, involving teaching, research and outreach activities. Following the mission statement, educational guidelines have been formulated that focus on accomplishing intended learning outcomes, improving teaching activities, and considering contextual changes relevant to the respective fields of study. The design of new programmes falls under the responsibilities of the Academic Vice-Chancellors and the respective faculties and is said to follow pre-defined processes and mechanisms within the scope of quality assurance ("Curriculum Redesign, Innovation, and Update Process"). This involves the formulation of necessary actions to implement new programmes with the help of annual reports, academic audits, and institutional analyses. In addition, stakeholder input is considered ("Graduate Profile Review, Build up or Adjustment Process"). The overall process of designing new study programmes is said to involve the formulation of graduate profiles, the determination of students' workloads and the incorporation of subject-specific and labour market-oriented demands. Responsibilities, participants, and relevant steps are individually defined for all evaluation, drafting, adjustment and validation procedures of graduate profiles, study plans, curricula, internship regulations, and teaching frameworks. The final assessment of the newly designed study programme is conducted under the "Institutional Portfolio Management Process".

UAC also notes that the Chilean Higher Education system is finalising a national Transferable Credit System (*Sistema de Créditos Transferibles* – SCT-Chile) in order to allow the streamlining of curriculum requirements and allow for comparability across study programmes. The University is currently planning to implement this system in a step-by-step process so that it can be applied to the design of new programmes and the revision of existing programmes in the future.

## Experts' Evaluation

The expert panel found well-established procedures for setting up programmes and defining the intended outcomes. Programmes are also designed to focus on problem-based learning to best prepare the graduates for the labour market, which is understood to be a good approach in programme setup. UAC also checks the national and international trends trying to develop competitive programmes. However, on a general scale, the internationalisation process still shows room for improvement that could also impact the development of new programmes. With the graduation and student profile of UAC in mind still, internationalisation should be further developed so that graduates are better prepared for the international labour field. While a prime example is the need to develop English proficiency in students (and partially also staff), UAC explained well that internationalisation is a broader topic of strategic importance for the institution.

UAC applies academic audits and student and teacher surveys to follow up the processes with particular attention to new programmes. They also make consultations with external stakeholders as part of this process to ensure clear educational objectives aligned with the graduate profile, which are defined in the programmes.

Although the institution has more than one campus, the experts believe it is a strength that there is a single curriculum committee to ensure educational programmes are the same in all its campuses. This strategy also assures that transversal skills are applied in all programmes.

As discussed later, supporting research will be of importance for UAC in the future. With solid points in teaching, UAC has already initiated steps to strengthen its staff's research and support its teaching staff in obtaining PhDs. An option to be considered on the strategic level is the enhancement of applied research systematically included in programmes that at the same time have relevance for the communities in the different parts where UAC campuses are placed. This would allow research close to community needs, and at the same time, build research skills and interests already in the students, and when included and monitored systematically, it will also help to enhance UAC's research output (**Finding 2**).

The institution shows scientific publications, some made in collaboration with other educational institutions. However, the university has a low ratio of PhD among their staff. They are seeking talents out of the university when they should be strengthening research at the UAC. Also, applying mobility programs focused on research training would be another way to improve scientific outcomes.

## Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

### 3. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

*Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned. [ESG, 1.9]*

#### Description

The evaluation of ongoing study programmes at UAC involves an analysis of current research trends, labour market requirements, student workload, progression, completion rates, learning environments and support services, and feedback from students regarding their satisfaction with the individual programmes. Following the pre-defined mechanisms within the internal quality assurance system, the review of study programmes involves the same standardised macro-processes as it is the case with the design of new study programmes on the faculty as well as on the programme level ("Curriculum Redesign, Innovation, and Update Process" and "Graduate Profile Review, Drafting, or Adjustment Process"). Further complementing processes that are reported concern external curricular practices as well as graduate and undergraduate satisfaction. All stakeholders involved, i.e. university and faculty management, study programme management, students, lecturers, administrative staff, labour market representatives and graduates, are represented in the respective committees responsible for the individual steps of programme monitoring and review. The criteria and steps in forming such committees are formally defined, as are the procedures of study plan adjustments.

The revision process of a study programme starts with the formation of the Curriculum Committee, which together with lecturers, the Undergraduate Teaching Director, the Deputy Director of Curriculum Innovation, and the Coordinator of Curriculum Innovation, put the following procedures into action:

- Collection of input with regards to the graduate profile, the academic load estimate, the university's guidelines for curricular updates including the official methodological guide, and the institutional format for the curriculum structure.
- Structuring of the individual programme subjects according to basic, intermediate and advanced levels
- Distribution of the academic load following the credit transfer system.
- Definition of general training subjects, integrative subjects with practical components, and subjects with a relation to service learning.
- Definition of internship regulation and graduation requirements.

In addition to these formal steps, the university mentions other communication channels that academic staff, administrative staff, and students can use to report further concerns, needs, and suggestions. The results of the individual review processes are said to be made available to the public in the form of annual reports.

### Experts' Evaluation

Within the organisational structure of the Autonomous University of Chile, different academic and management units are destined to analyse, regulate and monitor the different study programs in the disciplines that it teaches as an institution of higher education. From the expert panels' perspective, the academic unit of quality assurance that regulates the monitoring and advice of the study programmes and the teaching and learning processes used in these programmes is relevant, evidencing a coherence between the different educational processes and the results of these processes.

From an expert's point of view, UAC, in its general academic structure, presents units duly delimited and by a coherent and transparent structure for the formation, regulation and monitoring of the different academic procedures in applying academic programmes and processes.

Based on the interviews during the on site visit, the experts could also see a close relationship between UAC and the different stakeholders in the teaching-learning process, especially that of the study programmes themselves, which allow collecting information for adequate feedback and thus making necessary modifications to the study programs, including students through student centres, support centres for student-academic tutors, teachers' councils, and particularly from labour fields.

The University shows adequate processes of connection with the environment and a search for the community's needs where it is inserted or with whom it relates. Its relationship with regional communities, particularly those located in the Araucanía area and communities with particular characteristics and needs, seems relevant. The expert panel supports this practice and encourages UAC to continue on this path.

In general, the students present conformity with their study programs and their relationship with the UAC administration. There is also evidence that students can quickly contact their most direct advisors from UAC so they can raise their problems and have solutions to them. It was also observed that the results of the implementation of the study programmes meet the needs of the labour market and the community in general where they work, having a good reception from employers.

A consistent topic throughout all interviews with external stakeholders and students and confirmed in the programme sample was that in large parts, English language competencies are not sufficient to enable academic learning according to international standards. As the expert panel could observe, this partially leads to frustration among all participants. The expert panel also learned that this aspect was not a surprise to the University and its QA system. However, no convincing approach or strategy could be presented. In some programmes, adjustments were made; in others, that was not the case. It remained unclear if that would be an example where the "A" of the PDCA cycle suffers dissemination or whether, currently, the approach towards improving English language skills is still under discussion. However, also at a strategic level, UAC should outline how to

respond to the identified shortcoming and, in the end, strengthen the English proficiency of its students (**Finding 3**).

In summary, a solid and well-structured periodic review and quality management structure can observe that seeks to manage transparent academic processes, considering the observations as feedback from the different actors in the training process and the labour market. Considering the size of the institution with different campuses and catering to the partially different needs of the regions where UAC is placed, dissemination of information on the processes both transversally between the parallel units and subsequent level academics will still require attention in the future (**see Finding 1**).

### Conclusion

The criterion is partially fulfilled.

## 4. Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Students

*Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.*

[ESG, 1.3]

### Description

Regarding learning and teaching processes, the University refers to its pedagogical guidelines, which are included in the educational model (updated in 2017 by the Rector's Office). These guidelines concern the teacher-student relationship, teaching principles and assessment procedures. The teacher-student relationships to be pursued focus on mutual respect and an understanding of the learning process as a participatory collaboration involving all parties as active contributors. This is also reflected in the teaching principles to be applied, which aim at enabling students to fulfil an active role in their learning processes. In order to support students in this process, teaching activities are advised to be structured sequentially and gradually, thus enabling students to progress from basic to intermediate and advanced levels of learning. The pedagogical guidelines also explicitly refer to problem-based teaching and learning as a meaningful overall strategy that should combine students' needs and subject-specific and professional requirements to create meaningful and relevant learning experiences. Finally, collaborative learning and the enhancement of students' self-reflection of their learning process are mentioned as basic methodological principles to be applied by lecturers.

The pedagogical guidelines also include a set of criteria to be applied to assessing students' learning processes. Assessments should not only focus on declarative knowledge but also include procedural and conditional knowledge as complementing areas. The defined aim of assessments is to support students in developing their competencies, which is reflected in the recommendation to consider final learning outcomes and initial knowledge and intermediate milestones. Thus, the optimal methods are described as a dynamic combination of assessment forms that reflect assessment as a systematic process instead of an isolated act.

According to the report, UAC has implemented several instruments to monitor and improve teaching and assessment activities. An evaluation of learning results and the quality of teaching involves a QA cycle that focuses not only on the programmatic review but also on the instructional design of study programmes by taking into account students' learning outcomes. Furthermore, teaching performance is monitored and evaluated regularly. Together with data coming from student satisfaction surveys and teachers' self-evaluations, the results of teacher evaluations are said to be used for an annual review and update of course programmes, the validation of teaching material and the implementation of targeted teacher training. This university-level assessment of teaching activities is complemented by the National Learning Assessment System (SENA), in which, each semester, three subjects are selected for further evaluation of students' performances.

Students' complaints can be voiced either via the periodical satisfactory surveys or using the "Information, Complaints and Suggestions Inbox". This tool can be accessed freely on the university website and passes on complaints to the Quality Management Department of the QA Vice-Rectorate, which, if necessary, will forward these to the relevant academic and/or management units.

### Experts' Evaluation

The UAC is committed to student-centred teaching in its programmes. Through the Centre for Innovation and extensive teacher training, it ensures that these guidelines are implemented. From the expert perspective, the described cross-review of learning methods and content also is an excellent way to ensure the quality of courses and teaching. Teaching quality is subject to sophisticated and continuous evaluation.

As the expert panel could observe, even though the university is spread over several locations, there is a remarkable sense of "we" among all those involved (students, lecturers, practitioners). Together with the strong connection to the regions, this is an outstanding feature of the UAC. UAC offers teaching at different locations, which also show different levels of diversity. These differences are also addressed in the curricula and thus offer a particular feature of the degree programmes. With this being a solid point for UAC, for the future, it might seem important that students are supported and given the flexibility and mobility to take advantage of the different regional locations.

From what the expert panel learned during the site visit, the UAC handled the COVID pandemic brilliantly in teaching. It quickly switched to digital learning methods, which even brought students from the different campuses closer together. After the pandemic, the expert panel encourages UAC to carefully evaluate which methods it can continue to use profitably, as digital support for teaching will be essential for universities in the future (**Finding 4**).

From the expert panels' point of view, the supervision ratio at the UAC is outstanding, so that students have good access to the lecturers. This should continue to be used for mentoring and learning support to accompany students well on their learning paths. The many examinations and tests provide students with reasonable learning control (learning analytics). Appropriate policies are in place in the internal QA system to assure the suitable assessment approach. An area for future development could be the observation and monitoring of feedback and support from the teaching staff (following the assessment) so that students can benefit more from the examination system.

A particular highlight of teaching at the UAC is the mentoring programme offered by students in higher semesters for students in lower semesters. It is clear how much this not only provides support but also creates a particular university community. This programme is a solid point to address student diversity and support students in actively participating in the learning process should continue to be supported by the University.

### Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 5. Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification

*Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification. [ESG, 1.4]*

### Description

UAC applies the Single Admission System, a standardised national admission process followed by public and several private universities in Chile. In addition, degree and study programme specific criteria are set that students have to fulfil. All information about the national and programme-specific criteria and processes are

said to be communicated publicly. Even though there does not seem to be a nationally standardised process for recognising prior studies, UAC has created a particular admission programme that enables the evaluation of pre-existing credits or qualifications according to an equivalence matrix. The planned introduction of the national SCT-System mentioned above is also said to facilitate the recognition of prior learning activities further.

Student progression is closely monitored by so-called cycle evaluations and the above-mentioned National Learning Assessment System. Furthermore, the university has installed a Complementary Academic Support System that takes into account diagnostic evaluations of students' performances and, if necessary, offers auxiliary classes and facilitates extra-curricular internships. Furthermore, an online platform (SAGAF) has been set in place, which documents students' progression in their studies and serves as a reference for teaching staff and academic management to initiate other support instruments.

The requirements for certification and the necessary processes involved have been standardised across the university, following the "Degrees and Certificates Issuance Process". Upon graduation, students receive a certificate of the diploma exam, i.e. the defence, and a degree certificate.

Student mobility, as described in the SER, is supported by three overall processes. The "Incoming Student Mobility Process" provides a standardised framework for promoting, formalising and organising programmes for international students at UAC. The "Outgoing Student Mobility Process", on the other hand, supports UAC students in their endeavours to study abroad. This includes organisational support and the passing of MoUs with international universities, and the supply of financial support. All formal negotiations and agreements concerning mobility between UAC and partner universities are regulated by the "Process of International Mobility Agreements".

### **Experts' Evaluation**

The admission process for UAC's degree programmes is clearly defined and regulated by the state. However, as observed by the panel of experts, the state-verified competencies do not always precisely match the degree programmes. The UAC has only limited influence on this but is aware of the challenge and, as the panel learned in discussion with the management of UAC, takes it up in discussions with the responsible authorities.

The expert panel found that the systems and procedures for student admission are transparent and are adequately defined and that policies are supporting equal opportunities for students with particular circumstances. The interviews with the students and stakeholders confirmed that UAC effectively assures that the admission criteria are applied consistently. Some offers introduce new students to their programmes and the university culture and environment, and even in times of pandemic, UAC managed well to address the needs of new students.

The experts also could observe a sophisticated system to monitor the progression of students that allows the institution to follow up and identify students at risk and in potential need of extra support. At the same time, it became evident that institutional support for mobility is in place, however, it is only used to a minimal extent by students, both on the incoming and the outgoing level. The panel believes that priority should be given in the future to assessing and overcoming mobility limitations to increase internationalisation. While clearly economic limitations for students create a challenge, structural limitations such as language and teaching offers in English language should not be ignored. This will expand the portfolio of available mobility for students beyond Spanish-speaking countries in the region and increase the number of incoming students from abroad that will bring a new experience to the campus and for local students.

The expert panel also addressed the question of certification and found UAC's certification procedures up to date and appropriate as they include the achievement of learning outcomes, the level of education, and the status of the studies.

Overall, the panel is delighted with the procedures regarding admission, progression and certification and their implementation.

### Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 6. Teaching Staff

*Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their academic staff. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff. [ESG, 1.5]*

### Description

In the SER, the University recognises the vital role of the teaching staff in the design and organisation of students' learning processes. It strives to assure the quality of teaching by applying pre-defined standards and regulations to the recruitment, management, development and training of lecturers and teaching support personnel. The recruitment process described in the report aims to maximise objectivity and equity, and excellence by involving the Personnel Department, a Search Committee, and the respective Head of Department for conducting the call, interview, and selection of applicants. The criteria for recruitment defined in the SER include academic degree, professional experience, and teaching experience.

Complementing the QA process of performance evaluation, a "Base Plan Procedure" is applied annually, in which both regular and adjunct teaching staff take part in a didactic training course. Under the management of the Undergraduate Teaching Department, the Deputy Director of Teaching Development, the respective Programme Directors and the Pedagogical Coordinators selected lecturers are invited to attend methodological/didactic courses based on their performance evaluations. Part of this training is also a workshop on "Innovation and Collaborative Management in University Teaching". Innovation of teaching methodology is also explicitly mentioned in the university's strategic plan, updated in 2021. In the light of the current global pandemic, the University acknowledges the need for a transformation of teaching and learning and states its goal to develop towards a "Hybrid University Model". This model combines traditional teaching formats with an innovative dimension applying to curricular structures and teaching methodologies. Digital technologies are regarded as opportunities to complement and transform traditional teaching formats if necessary and are also said to strengthen students' autonomous learning activities.

Linking teaching and research activities is explicitly supported, as stated in the SER. The University offers internal research support funds across subjects and support schemes for research stays abroad and funding for national and international academic events.

### Experts' Evaluation

The UAC has a clear understanding of the role of teaching staff. There is a clear, transparent and fair process for staff recruitment and the institution assures that all departments follow this process. There are criteria for recruitment and conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching. The expert panel reviewed these policies based on the documents but also interviewed staff at different levels of experience to confirm to which extent their experience matches the defined policies.

UAC encourages innovation in teaching methods and supports this with the Centre for Innovation and a mandatory comprehensive teacher training which is an approach that strongly finds the support of the expert group. While coming as an unplanned necessity, during the pandemic, the use of new technologies was enormously increased, which of course created a challenge not only to students, but at the same time to staff. However, the panel of experts learned from different interviews that the overall support from the main level was good

and that they felt the priority was to find a way to allow students the best possible learning experience and at the same time supporting staff in gaining the skills required in the digital teaching environment.

It became apparent that the proportion of PhDs on the teaching staff is not exceptionally high. There are already first initiatives taken by UAC to increase the PhD ratio and offer its staff support in obtaining a PhD, and the expert panel can confirm first successes as some interviewees benefited from these policies. With the first steps of success visible, the panel believes that the staff development strategy of UAC should be further developed to increase the possibilities for UAC teaching staff members to acquire a PhD degree at UAC (**Finding 5**). The teaching staff should be able to use and exemplify academic freedom in research and teaching. As this is university education and not purely professional training, lecturers should also be role models in research.

The panel was delighted with the atmosphere and openness of interviews, particularly with staff. Also, student and stakeholder interviews praised staff qualifications which allow concluding good policies covering staff. Looking forward and combining the need to develop English language skills in students and also develop research, a prerequisite will be to implement policies to assure progress in the development of English language competencies of staff (and students) to enable a better exchange with non-Spanish speaking universities on the one hand and to expand their research activities with non-Spanish speaking countries. Besides better meeting labour market requirements, this will also support the broadness of the academic quality of the education (**Finding 6**).

### Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 7. Learning Resources and Student Support

*Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided. [ESG, 1.6]*

### Description

As described in the SER, relevant resources and infrastructure standards are considered from the very incipient design of new study programmes. Furthermore, the evaluation if they meet best practice standards is conducted regularly in the Annual Reports and Academic Audits. In addition, feedback is sought from students and teaching personnel in the form of satisfaction surveys. Also, the current strategic development plan of the University includes a "Master Plan of Infrastructure and Academic Resources", which aims to consider not only running costs and requirements but also current developments (e.g. new demands due to the pandemic) in the annual assignment of funds with regards to resources.

Students are supported in the progress of their studies through the Complementary Academic Support System mentioned above. Here, students' learning outcomes are documented, and needs for individual support in auxiliary classes or extra-curricular internships are identified. Furthermore, the university lists psychological support, student welfare services and university life enhancement programmes as additional offers.

### Experts' Evaluation

The Institutional Portfolio Management Process (ES-GO-01) defines the strategic analysis process of the educational offer portfolio for undergraduate, graduate, and lifelong learning programmes, in order to define the vacancies and annual offer for each campus and approves the financial resources to implement the academic offer in order to guarantee its correct implementation. The expert panel discussed with satisfaction the practical implementation of this process to better understand the reality and particularly the flexibility to address individual needs for each campus with regards to the assignment funds with regards to resources.

The Design, Review and Development Process of Survey instruments (ES-AI-01) is another essential instrument to determine the alignment degree among expectation and satisfaction of all interest groups. That allows to systematically review and improve policies and institutional guidelines related to learning resources and infrastructures.

During the interviews, particularly with the students, the academic support system was highlighted as a strength, and students could also confirm that feedback mechanisms also address the learning resources and support. From an expert's point of view in this area, examples given by students were the strongest with regards to impact, as challenges concerning the feasibility of studies and the need for specific support are much more evident to students as potentially academic challenges. Consequently, the evidence from the interview also supported the content of the provided documentation in light of consideration of different student needs at the locations, planning and provision of learning resources, and consideration of administrative issues and student support mechanisms.

The experts concluded that regarding student support and learning resources, the implemented mechanisms are fit for purpose.

### Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 8. Information

*Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities. [ESG, 1.7]*

*Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible. [ESG, 1.8]*

### Description

UAC states that information on the academic offer, curriculum and degree objectives, graduate profiles, policies, service offers, and the outcomes of external quality assessments is collected, updated, and made available to all internal and external stakeholders. The tools to systematically collect, analyse and process relevant information towards improvements mentioned are (1) annual reports, (2) annual audits, (3) the online platform SAGAF, (4) cycle evaluations, and (5) student, graduate and alumni surveys.

Information management is further regulated by two dedicated QA-processes of institutional analysis which define the steps related to official information management upon formal requests and the proactive identification and dissemination of relevant information to interested parties.

### Experts' Evaluation

From the experts' point of view, it is ensured that information for the management of the programmes is systematically collected and used within the QA system. For this purpose, the University has established processes that deal with obtaining and processing information. In addition to regulating the flow of information, both the new design of surveys and the review of existing surveys are also the subject of the QA system. The target groups of the respective surveys are students, graduates, academicians, collaborators, directives and employers. The surveys aim to get an assessment of the level of satisfaction with the university and collect data on special topics such as the expectation of new students entering the programmes of the university. Nearly all surveys are conducted annually, providing the university with a large amount of data. Faculties can request additional data sets, such as the academic performance of students adapted to their needs. The data is used in further processes, for example, in the annual reviews of all programmes.

In order to achieve the goals of internationalisation of studies and further establishment of international research activities, the University should offer the information on the website also in the English language. Further attention should also be paid to the accessibility of documents. Currently, documents, such as the General Examination Regulations, are only offered as scans on the website. In order to digitally search through documents, have them translated automatically, and support visually impaired people, the University could continue to offer documents in digital form.

All higher-level applicable regulations and other organisational documents are published centrally via the University's website. At the program level, only general qualification objectives and a syllabus with module names can be found. In the long run, in the interest of transparency and to enable exchange and mobility of students, UAC might consider publishing the module descriptions and, particularly course learning outcomes on the websites of the individual programs.

### **Conclusion**

The criterion is fulfilled.

## VII. Findings

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1. UAC must improve the dissemination of actions taken based on the PDCA cycle to the relevant stakeholders to increase acceptance and ownership of the QA cycle.
2. UAC might consider strengthening research systematically by including regionally focused topics connected with applied research that are relevant to its surrounding communities.
3. UAC must outline how its internal QA system responds to the identified need for more English proficiency and how in the end, English proficiency of its students is strengthened.
4. Fostering student mobility between campuses should be a consideration in the future and the continuation of select digital courses even in a post-COVID environment.
5. The staff development strategy of UAC should be further developed to increase the possibilities for UAC teaching staff members to acquire a PhD degree at UAC.
6. Policies should be implemented to assure progress in the development of English competencies of staff and students to enable a better exchange with non-Spanish speaking universities on the one hand, and to expand their research activities with non-Spanish speaking countries.