

ROMANIA

Advisory Services Agreement on Technical Assistance to Enhance Quality Assurance in Higher Education System in Romania (P157508)

Output 3.1.

Draft Recommendation for the Methodology for External Assessment of Higher Education Institutions and Associated Management Instruments

July, 2019

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Structure of the document

Chapter	Content
1	Introduction: this part informs about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The purpose of this book (I) ○ The Romanian Higher Education: progress and challenges (II) ○ Quality assurance in Romania (III) ○ The development and implementation of a new QA framework in higher education in Romania (IV) ○ The Methodology specificity for institutional evaluation in Romania including the quality principles of ARACIS (V)
2	Quality standards for the institutional evaluation: this part stipulates the revised quality standards and assessment criteria to be used for internal and external evaluation at institutional level.
3	The overarching methodology for institutional evaluation. This part refers to the 2018 Methodology of ARACIS, adapted with suggestions meant to better align to European practices. It includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The legal procedure; ○ The 4-step evaluation ○ A table recapitulating the quality standards ○ The scoring (7-scale scoring; the 4- level ELIR scoring combining assessment and enhancement scoring). ○ The Appeal procedure (ARACIS + suggestion for an Appeal commission).
4	Quality standards for the Program Accreditation on the Bachelor and Master level
5	Overarching Methodology for Program Accreditation. This part refers to the revised Methodology of ARACIS, adapted with suggestions meant to better align to European practices.
6	Internal Quality Assurance guidelines: this part provides guidance to the HEIs in the self-evaluation, which is key part of the internal quality assurance. It includes preparation and support from the institution, conducting the self-evaluation, analyzing and drafting the report.
7	The experts handbook: this part aims at guiding the external expert to best prepare, conduct interviews, analyze and draft their contribution to the evaluation report. It includes: <p>The Experts Committee (I)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Suggestions to improve capabilities of the Experts. ○ Ethics and confidentiality ○ Compensation for Experts. <p>The organisation and role of experts during the site visit (II)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ General principles for the evaluation visit ○ Analysis of docs and self evaluation report ○ Expected attitudes and posture during the site visit <p>Drafting the Expert Committee's report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assignment for each Expert ○ Tips to facilitate drafting of report <p>Analytical grid for Experts, aimed at helping them analyze the quality standards and score them.</p>

8	Glossary. This part informs on the terms used in the entire document. It refers to the existing glossary in the Methodology 2018 of ARACIS with additional terms from commonly used European definitions.
9	Annexes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of Evaluation Charter • Template of institutional report

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ANOSR	National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania
ARACIS/RAQAHE	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
CQEA	Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (Romanian acronym: CEAC – Comisia pentru Evaluarea si Asigurarea Calitatii)
DDAI	Doctoral Degree awarding institutions (Romanian acronym: IOSUD - Institutie Organizatoare de Studii Universitare de Doctorat)
EC	European Commission
ECTS	Transferable credits
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	External Quality Assurance
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
HES	Higher Education System
HEI / HEIs	Higher Education Institution(s) Higher Education Institution, generic term for an education provider authorized to operate provisionally/university/academia/institute/school or other equivalents
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
ISBN	International Standard Book Number, an international code for identifying books
ISSN	International Standard Serial Number, an international code for identifying serial publications
MDAI	Master's Degree Awarding Institutions (Romanian acronym: IOSUM – Institutie Organizatoare de Studii Universitare de Masterat)
Min.	Minimum acceptable level for achieving standards and performance indicators
MoNE	Ministry of National Education
MoNE	Ministry of National Education (Romanian acronym: MEN – Ministerul Educatiei Nationale)
NCAEA	National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (in Romanian: CNEAA – Consiliul National de Evaluare si Acreditare Academica)
NCFHE	National Council for Financing Higher Education (Romanian acronym: CNFIS – Consiliul National pentru Finantarea Invatamantului Superior)
NFQ/NQF	National Framework of Qualifications National Qualifications Framework
NHES	National Higher Education System
NIS	National Institute of Statistics
NQA	National Qualifications Authority (Romanian acronym: ANC – Autoritatea Nationala pentru Calificari)
NRE	National Register of Evaluators (Romanian acronym: Registrul National al Evaluatorilor)
PI	Performance indicator (Romanian acronym: IP – Indicator de performanta)
QA	Quality Assurance

QAD	Quality Assurance Department
QMS	Quality Management System
Ref.	Maximum identifiable level for achieving standards and performance indicators
PS	Performance Standard
SWOT Analysis	Analysis that helps identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB	World Bank

Chapter 1 - Introduction of ARACIS and the Romanian Context

1.1. Rationale

1. This document presents recommendations to reform and improve the methodology for Quality Assurance (QA) in Higher Education (HE) in Romania. It has been produced as part of the support services that the World Bank is providing to the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency – ARACIS – to improve their current systems.

2. The methodology proposed here concerns the external evaluation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as well as of their study programmes. In addition, the methodology includes handbook for the preparation of external experts in their visits to externally evaluate institutions and their study programmes and guidelines for HEIs for the development of their own Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) procedures.

3. The need to adjust and enhance the QA framework currently in use in Romania emerges from a number of changes in the HE scenario in recent years. From the mid-1990s to the late 2000s the size of the HE sector increased markedly and significantly in the country, and this is when the first steps were made in QA in HE in Romania. Yet, since 2010 the number of students enrolling in this level of education has been decreasing and Romania is the EU member with the lowest proportion of its population that hold higher education degrees, despite having improved from 22.9 percent in 2013 to 26.3 percent in 2017. While demographics and migration underpin the decrease in participation, ensuring the quality of HE is key to make the sector attractive and relevant. At the international level, following the approval in 2005 of the European Standard and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in HE and their adoption in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) the landscape of QA in HE has been significantly reshaped – mainly, a shift to a focus on internal quality assurance occurred, which resulted in reconsiderations of how external quality assurance is conducted. In 2015, in fact, the ESG were reformulated to reflect this and other significant changes in HE in the region, like an increasing emphasis on student-centred learning.

4. The proposal presented here thus takes into account the changes in the domestic and internal HE sector but it is also based on the current legal framework regulating Higher Education and Research in Romania and builds on the experience of ARACIS in ensuring the quality of Higher Education since its inception in 2006. More specifically, a number of inputs were taken into account for the development of this methodology such as:

- i. Documents and reflections of ARACIS on the change and improvement of the quality assurance system, including:
 - a. Suggestions provided by ARACIS on their long-lasting experience of in assessing programmes and institutions considered during the meetings held between September 2018 to March 2019
 - b. Recommendations provided in ENQA reviews of ARACIS from 2018
 - c. The methodology for the classification of Romanian higher education institutions (31 July 2018) and the related list of indicators proposed by ARACIS for INFO-TOOL.
- ii. Contributions from ARACIS experts and staff as well as from student representatives collected during two pre-consultation workshops held in Bucharest on 21 and 22 February 2019.
- iii. Reflections on the quality assurance of doctoral schools and research activities, that is on-going in 2019, have been integrated into the national framework.
- iv. International good practices from national quality assurance frameworks such as those from AAO (Switzerland), ASIIN (Germany), Hcéres (France), NVAO (Netherlands), AEQES (Belgium), AQU (Catalunya), ANECA (Spain), and the approach to external evaluation of HEIs developed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in Scotland, ELIR (Enhancement-Led Institutional Reviews).

1.2. Romanian Higher Education: progress and challenges

5. The Romanian Higher Education System (HES) is organized by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), and includes all accredited higher education institutions: universities, institutes, academies of study, higher education schools etc. Romania has a formal tertiary education structure that follows the Bologna scheme:

- First Cycle: Bachelor's degree – 3 years (180 ECTS) or 4 years (240 ECTS) for regular full-time programs; 5 or 6 years (300 or 360 ECTS respectively) for EU regulated professions, such as medicine, pharmacy, architecture;
- Second Cycle: Master's Degree – 1 or 2 years (60-120 ECTS);
- Third Cycle: Doctoral Studies – 3 years; in Romania, doctoral studies are seen more as a continuation of the first two cycles, rather than individual research projects.

Rapid expansion and decline in HE participation and attainment in Romania since the 1990s

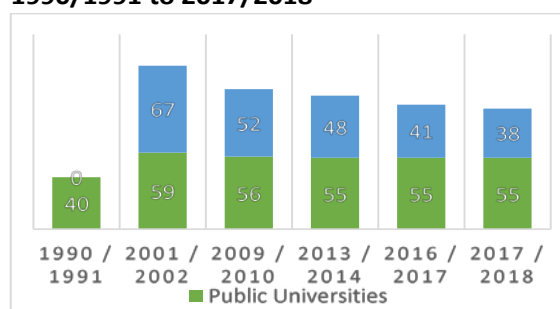
6. In early 1990s, the Romanian HES expanded rapidly, and Romania tripled its number of tertiary education institutions, from 40 universities in the academic year 1990/1991 (only public entities) to 126 universities in the academic year 2001/2002, with 67 private entities (Table 1). The number reduced to 93 universities in the academic year 2018/2019¹.

Table 1 - Number of universities over the last decades.

University year	Public universities	Private universities	Total no. of universities
1990/1991	40	0	40
2001/2002	59	67	126
2009/2010	56	52	108
2013/2014	55	48	103
2016/2017	55	41	96
2018/2019	55	38	93

Source: Data compiled from different reports of MoNE

Figure 1 – Number of universities from 1990/1991 to 2017/2018



7. The evolution of higher education system had an intrinsic dynamic, covering only the need of graduates, without linkages with the labor market. At the same time, without an adequate internal quality assurance, private university Spiru Haret entered a highly mediatic scandal, followed by closing the distance learning programs in some faculties. Consequently, trust in private higher education significantly decreased, affecting the number of students enrolled in private education, which sharply decreased by 82 percent. The number of faculties has not changed dramatically, decreasing only by 12 percent in the last decade (Table 2).

Table 2 - Number of faculties and students enrolled over the last decades.

Year	public faculties	private faculties	total faculties	public students	private students	total students
1990	186	0	186	192,810	0	192,810
2000	438	258	696	382,478	150,674	533,152
2007	432	199	631	526,844	380,509	907,353
2017	406	148	554	471,376	67,495	538,871
2017 vs 2007	6%	26%	12%	11%	82%	41%

Source: Data compiled from National Institute of Statistics (NIS), 2019.

8. The boom in student number happened when private HEIs enrolled in large numbers in social and economic sciences and reached 380,509 in 2007. In 2009, the growth rate in HE in Romania was the highest

¹ Report on the Status of Higher Education in Romania 2017, Ministry of National Education.

in Europe, above the EU27 average. The increase in the number of students enrolled compared to 1998 accounted for 20 percent of the total EU27 growth, while Romania's population aged 19-24 represented only 4.4 percent of the EU27 population.²

9. But, the population has declined in the last decade and that has reduced also the school age population and the number of students eligible to enter the higher education system. As a result, the number of students enrolled in BA programs has halved, reducing from 907.353 in 2007 to 408.179 in 2017.

10. The increasing number of diplomas on the domestic market and more selective external market forced more young Romanians to no longer consider HE as an opportunity for their career. In line with the developments of the private sector the labor market started to improve, and more signals have emerged to the idea that the diploma is no longer a guarantee of a job and, even less, of a well-paid job. HE has greatly contributed to its own regress. The focus on individual and institutional financial advantages has annulled any rational strategy, and the negative effects haven't delayed.³

Table 3 - Number of students enrolled over the last decades.

Bachelor students in public HEIs					
Year	full time	night class	reduced frequency	distance learning	Total
2000	332,134	3,100	12,303	34,941	382,478
2007	428,563	1,132	20,101	77,048	526,844
2017	322,012	0	8,586	21,701	352,299
2017 vs 2007	25%	-	57%	72%	33%
Bachelor students in private HEIs					
Year	full time	night class	reduced frequency	distance learning	Total
2000	97,102	121	50,484	2,967	150,674
2007	127,412	0	69,234	183,863	380,509
2017	45,324	0	6,488	4,068	55,880
2017 vs 2007	64%	-	91%	98%	85%

Source: Data compiled from National Institute of Statistics, 2019.

11. With university enrollment declining over the last years, trying to engage nontraditional students might be a way for universities to increase their success. Nontraditional students can be older students, age 24 and older, working full time, financially independent. They can also be parents. Nontraditional students are seeking higher education to better prepare for a career. As nontraditional student population grow, it is imperative for the academic staff to learn how to work with these students, to retain them in the system and ensure their academic success. And Romanian universities must adapt to these new challenges. Only several Romanian universities have started offering a limited number of online courses so far.

12. Education has a key role in the Europe 2020 Strategy. It is not reduced to statistical comparisons, it is about the generation of knowledge, skills, employability, productivity, and ultimately well-being, which - by quality and competitiveness - is de facto integrated in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).⁴

13. The "National Strategy for Tertiary Education 2015 – 2020 in Romania" includes specific measures to increase tertiary education attainment by: encouraging outreach to nontraditional learners, including adults, and disadvantaged students; and ensuring an appropriate quality level of students' learning conditions, aimed at improving access and participation of nontraditional students, and disadvantaged students, as well as measures to align higher education to labor market needs⁵. The data below reflects that these measures are not completely implemented, and results cannot be seen yet.

² Romanian Court of Accounts, Performance Audit Report - Analysis of the substantiation and evolution of the situation regarding the objective of increasing the percentage of higher education graduates in line with the provisions of the Europe 2020 Strategy

³ Idem.

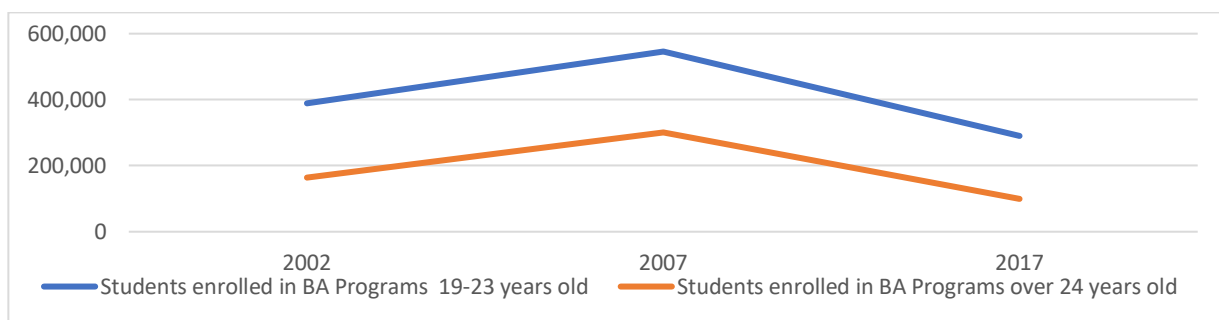
⁴ Idem.

⁵ The National Strategy for Tertiary Education 2015 – 2020 in Romania, GD 565/2015.

Table 1 - Net enrollment rate in BA Programs – evolution for 2002-2007-2017

		number of persons		
		2002	2007	2017
Students enrolled in BA Programs	19-23 years old	388,242	545,845	290,206
Resident population		1,674,931	1,488,358	1,044,532
<i>Net enrollment rate</i>		23%	37%	28%
Students enrolled in BA Programs	over 24 years old	164,010	300,726	99,440
Resident population		14,853,565	14,810,564	14,640,351
<i>Net enrollment rate</i>		1.10%	2.03%	0.68%

Source: National Institute for Statistics (NIS), 2019

Figure 1 - Students enrolled in BA Programs 2002 – 2007 – 2017

14. In the recent years, **negative demographic trends** have been observed in most age groups, in particular for 19-23 years old. In the same time, the number of students enrolled in the pre-university education decreased yearly. In 2017-2018 school year, the pre-university education system has comprised around 3 million students, recording a decrease of almost 24 thousand students compared to the previous school year⁶.

15. Demographic trend is a major factor affecting the number of students enrolled in higher education. But, this evolution in the higher education population was also determined by other factors, such as: the decrease in graduation rate at the Bacalaureate exam, the Bologna system that reduced the duration of bachelor studies, the imposed **quality standards** and the maximum tuition capacity for distance learning / reduced frequency, the need of satisfying the demand for higher qualifications for a large number of citizens who have been active on the labor market before starting their studies, the increasing number of high school graduates who have chosen to study abroad.⁷

16. The Europe 2020 Strategy has set a target of increasing the number of people in the EU aged 30 to 34 attaining tertiary education to 40 percent, and member states have set national targets. The Government of Romania committed to reach 26.7 percent by 2020. Romania has the lowest tertiary education attainment rate in Europe, 24.6 percent in 2018, according to the Eurostat data⁸. During the last years, Romania has shown a constant increase, from 22.9 percent in 2013 to 26.3 percent in 2017, being close to reach the national target. Unfortunately, the rate decreased to 24.6 percent in 2018. The decrease is due to both the demographical decline and the migration.

⁶ Report on the Status of Pre-university Education in Romania 2017-2018, Ministry of National Education.

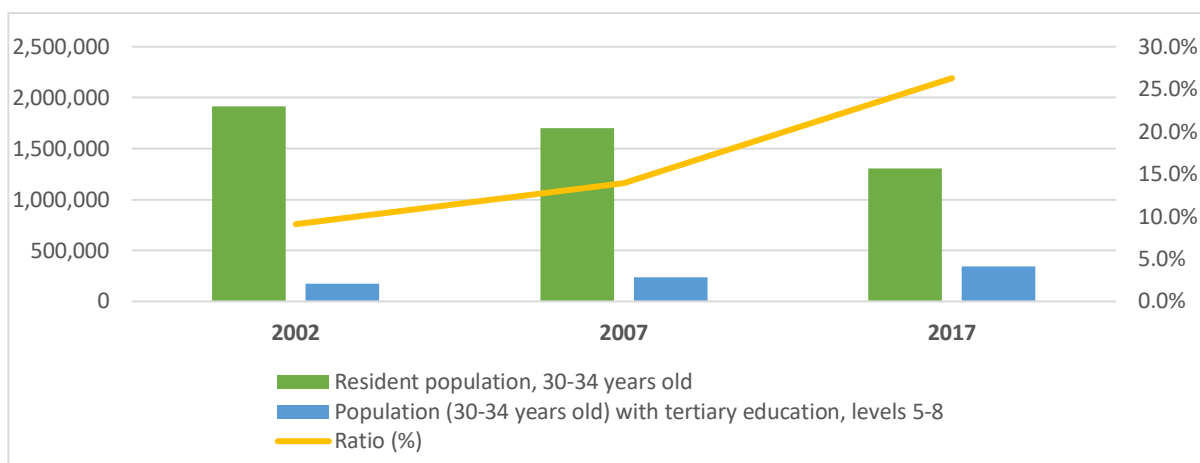
⁷ National Council for Statistics and Prognosis of Higher Education, Point of view regarding the substantiation of the tuition number of places for the academic year 2018/2019.

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

Table 2 - Population (30-34 years old) with tertiary education (levels 5-8) – evolution for 2002-2007-2017

Romania	number of persons		
	2002	2007	2017
Resident population (30-34 years old)	1,916,654	1,701,945	1,303,965
Population (30-34 years old) with tertiary education (levels 5-8)	174,415.5	236,570.4	342,942.8
Ratio (percentage)	9.1%	13.9%	26.3%

Source: Eurostat 2019.

Figure 2 - Evolution of the population (30-34 years old) with tertiary education (levels 5-8)

Quality and Relevance of Higher Education in Romania

17. However, the ratio above is significant only if it is based on **educational quality**, employability, creativity, productivity and ultimately on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. In the absence of active measures to motivate young people to pursue and complete university studies, Romania's target of increasing the share of the population with higher education has a low level of medium-term achievement, maintaining Romania in the peripheral EU area in this regard.⁹

Table 3 - Tertiary education attainment rate¹⁰ in Romania and neighboring countries

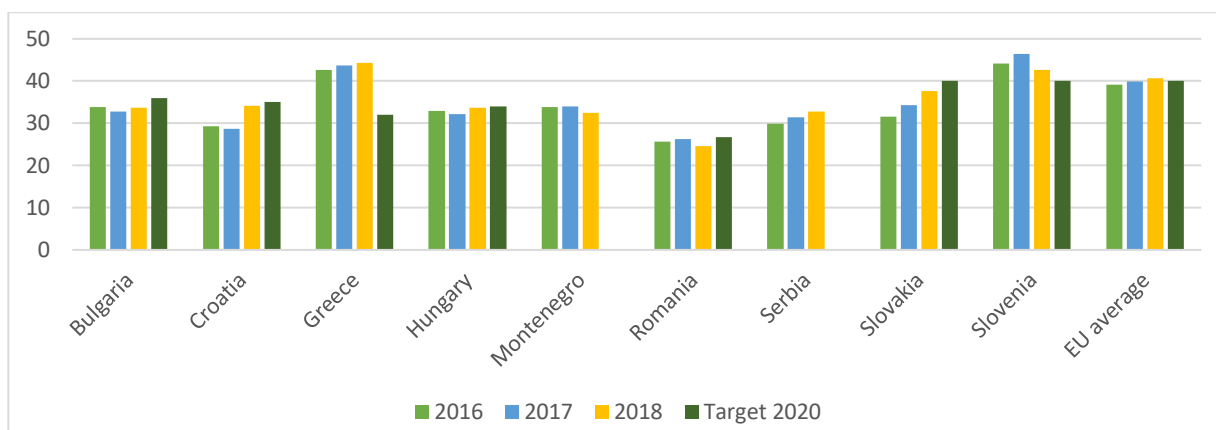
Country	2016	2017	2018	Target 2020	Country	2016	2017	2018	Target 2020
Bulgaria	33.8	32.8	33.7	36.0	Romania	25.6	26.3	24.6	26.7
Croatia	29.3	28.7	34.1	35.0	Serbia	29.9	31.4	32.8	:
Greece	42.7	43.7	44.3	32.0	Slovakia	31.5	34.3	37.7	40.0
Hungary	33.0	32.1	33.7	34.0	Slovenia	44.2	46.4	42.7	40.0
Montenegro	33.9	34.0	32.4	:	EU average	39.2	39.9	40.7	40.0

Source: Eurostat, 2019. / : = not available.

⁹ National Council for Statistics and Prognosis of Higher Education, Point of view regarding the substantiation of the tuition number of places for the academic year 2018/2019.

¹⁰ At the European level, the indicator is defined as the percentage of the population aged 30-34 who have successfully completed tertiary studies (e.g. university, higher technical institution, etc.). This educational attainment refers to ISCED 2011 level 5-8 for data from 2014 onwards. The indicator is based on the EU Labor Force Survey. The source of data is EUROSTAT, last updated on 04/25/2019, available [here](#).

Figure 3 - Tertiary education attainment rate in Romania and neighboring countries



18. The 2019 Report of the European Commission¹¹ underlines that higher education is not sufficiently aligned with the labor market. The number of graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics is low, as a result of low participation in higher education. Employers report that graduates entering the labor market have overly theoretical skills and often lack key soft skills, including problem solving, teamwork and communication. Unfortunately, there was no concern in assessing the performance of the system and validating (or invalidating) its efficiency and effectiveness.¹²

19. The rapid expansion of tertiary education in Romania has led to a quality trade-off, which determined a relative saturation of the labor market. Sociological studies revealed an inadequate relationship between the higher education offer and employers' requirements. The past years were characterized by a rise in unemployment of the most educated population, and of the youngest.¹³

20. The economy's research and innovative capacity could be improved by increased science-business cooperation. HEIs do not have mechanisms to systematically integrate industry needs into their teaching and research programs. Knowledge transfer offices are not yet fully operational despite EU funds having been allocated for this. The continuous decline in the number of tertiary graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics further hampers knowledge transfer. Romania is also confronted with a significant migration of skilled people, having one of the largest scientific diasporas among EU countries. Further investments supporting science-business cooperation and skills are needed.

21. Romania's decline and ageing population, students and workforce migration to other European countries require a balance between education policy and labor market reforms to converge on the equity, quality and relevance dimensions. According to the OECD, Romania is the tenth main country of origin in terms of migration flows in the G20. In terms of high-skilled immigration, Romania recorded the largest increase in the first decade of this century (about 492,000 persons in 2010–11).¹⁴

22. The number of Romanian students abroad more than doubled in 16 years, from about 12.5 thousand in 2000 to about 33.4 thousand in 2016. Romanian students cite the attractiveness of the educational offer and becoming proficient in a foreign language as the main reasons for studying abroad. Internship and traineeship programs, job opportunities and proximity to the family are the most important factors that would motivate students to return and work in Romania. When asked if they are interested in a job, internship, or traineeship in Romania or abroad, a large majority preferred the opportunities available abroad. This is consistent with the need to create labor market incentives for lifelong learning.¹⁵

¹¹ Country Report Romania 2019 Including an In-Depth Review on the Prevention and Correction of Macroeconomic Imbalances, Brussels, 27.2.2019 SWD (2019) 1022 final.

¹² Romanian Court of Accounts- Performance Audit Report - Analysis of the substantiation and evolution of the situation regarding the objective of increasing the percentage of higher education graduates in line with the provisions of the Europe 2020 Strategy

¹³ Report on the Status of Higher Education in Romania 2016, Ministry of National Education.

¹⁴ Romania - Systematic Country Diagnostic, BACKGROUND NOTE, Migration, The World Bank, 2018.

¹⁵ Idem.

Romanian students' satisfaction was the lowest in Europe between 2016 and 2017, with only 39% of students being satisfied or very satisfied with teaching quality¹⁶.

23. To address these challenges, there is a need to implement measures both for quality and participation in higher education as already promoted by the 2015–2020 Strategy for Tertiary Education. At the same time, excellence in higher education and research highly depends on quality assurance in universities and in doctoral schools.¹⁷

Table 4 - Romanian Higher Education in Figures (2018)

Variable	Data
Institutions	93 higher education institutions, 55 public HEIs, and 38 private HEIs; 508 faculties, out of which 372 public faculties and 136 private faculties (accredited or temporary authorized). Public education represents 59% of HEIs and 73% of total faculties.
Students	App. 532.000 students, 65% enrolled in BA, 31% in MA, and 4% in Doctoral Programs; 54% of students are women; 92% of students are enrolled in full-time, 8% in part-time (reduced frequency); 87% of students are enrolled in public HEIs.
Fields of study	The highest share of students, 24%, are enrolled in business administration and law; the second largest, 22%, in engineering, manufacturing, and construction.
Academic staff	App. 26.600 academic staff, 51% are women; 89% of academic staff are teaching in public institutions; 98% of academic staff are full-time; 66% of academic staff are between 35 and 54 years old, 13% are less than 35 years old, and 21% are over 55 years old.

Source: Eurostat, 2019.

1.3. Quality Assurance in Romania at present

The national quality assurance system

24. ARACIS is an autonomous public institution of national interest with legal status and financial autonomy. It is funded by evaluation fees paid by HEIs, and projects (both European and Romanian projects financed by European funds). Its independence is statutory. Its operational independence from HEIs and the Romanian government is guaranteed by official documents.

25. The Government, particularly the MoNE, has no direct institutional influence on decisions made by ARACIS regarding its approach, the external evaluation of study programs, institutional quality assurance, or the development of methodologies. The MoNE decides on accreditation only with advice provided by ARACIS. However, the MoNE is not allowed to modify any proposed methodology unilaterally.

26. ARACIS is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA), the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), and the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE). ENQA renewed ARACIS' membership for the second time in 2018, and their admission is valid until 2023.

¹⁶ The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report

¹⁷ Romania - Systematic Country Diagnostic, BACKGROUND NOTE, Education, The World Bank, 2018.

27. ARACIS is led by a **Council** of 21 members—17 higher education professors, two student representatives, one employer representative, and one person who represents the unions in higher education. Individuals who hold official positions within the Presidency, the Government, Parliament, or a Rector position at an HEI, cannot serve as members of the ARACIS Council while employed in any of the aforementioned roles. This restriction aims to ensure the independence and transparency of the agency. According to the most recent ENQA report, the Council has achieved an improved representation of various subject domains and gender balance among the members.

28. Five members of the ARACIS Council form its **Executive Board**, which is responsible for daily management activities of the Agency. Two of the five members of the Executive Board, the President and Vice-president of the Council, are elected by their peers via a confidential/secret voting procedure. The other three members of the Executive Board are appointed by the President: two Department Directors, for Accreditation and External Quality Evaluation Departments, and a Secretary General. The technical and administrative staff comprise 46 individuals who are selected through a competitive process.

29. ARACIS has **two main commissions**, the Accreditation Department and the Department of External Evaluation of Quality, and has 15 “Permanent Specialty Commissions”, which advise on academic matters on topic such as Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences, Social and Political Sciences, Economic Sciences, Engineering Sciences and others.

The three main activities of ARACIS

30. ARACIS is conducting three main activities as follows:

1. *program external evaluation/accreditation* (responsible for provisionally authorizing new programs, analyse self-evaluation, formulate follow-up procedures, and conduct external evaluation),
2. *institutional external evaluation/accreditation* (initial evaluate suitability of new HEIs and periodically review the accreditation status) and
3. *evaluation of master study domains*.¹⁸

31. According to Romanian **Law no. 87/2006**, accreditation is a legal procedure which includes two key steps: provisional authorization and accreditation. If an education provider intends to establish a new HEI or study program, corresponding to a specific qualification, the education provider needs to undertake a process of **external evaluation**. This process allows for provisional authorization, and then for accreditation, after successfully operating the study program for a number of years. For example, for accreditation of study programs at the bachelor degree level, the interval between the graduation of the first cohort of students and the application for accreditation of the study program should not exceed two years; while accreditation of HEIs can be undertaken after the accreditation of three study programs.

32. ARACIS conducted almost 2,400 external quality evaluations and 70 institutional evaluations between 2014 and 2017.¹⁹ International evaluations conducted by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), a quality assurance agency listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) evaluated 70 institutions between 2012 and 2014²⁰. Firstly, their key findings shown that little autonomy, constant legislative change and financial uncertainties are limiting the long-term strategic capacity of these institutions. Secondly, the national quality assurance process and the complicated regulatory framework inhibit institutional innovation and diversity across the sector. Thirdly, due to little institutional cooperation, the institutions’ varying sustainability and quality, and the existence of numerous small institutions fragment the HES in Romania.

¹⁸ ARACIS Activity Report 2015 - <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publications/aracis-publications/>

¹⁹ ENQA Agency Review: Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), 2018 - <https://enqa.eu/index.php/external-review-report-of-aracis/>

²⁰ Romania System Review Report

33. Overall, Romania's HEIs will improve in quality if it addresses the following key challenges:

- Insufficient budgeting for HIEs and research and development
- Unsuitable internal governance organization (highly bureaucratic and structured organization)
- Skills mismatches (weak match between educational training and employers' needs)
- Brain drain towards more developed European economies (almost one in five working age Romanian live in another EU country)
- Academic staff shortage (ageing of the professoriate in Romania)
- Unappealing field for new staff (low wages, little investment in human capital, limited opportunities for growth)
- Large gap in student enrolment for students from lower socioeconomic background (especially rural students)
- Out-dated teaching methods and course content, lack of flexibility in curriculum and teaching
- Little local and regional engagement with neighbouring universities, private actors, civil society
- Limited responsiveness ability to current demographic changes.

1.4. The development and implementation of a new QA framework in higher education in Romania: maturity of the system or change of paradigm?

Introduction

34. Like in the rest of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Romanian higher education system is currently experiencing a big change triggered by a "joint-venture" of two powerful components: (i) the (r)evolution of higher education towards a more innovative sector to respond to the challenges of global dynamics –making the best of the astonishing technological revolution available to the average citizen– and (ii) the consequences derived from the maturity of the reform represented by the EHEA among the Romanian higher education sector.

35. Therefore, to best support the changes faced by the HE sector in the coming years, quality assurance (QA) of higher education has to respond to this double challenge by providing higher education institutions (HEIs), the government and the QA body with renewed tools and procedures to deal with the changing landscape, and with a new approach and understanding of the so-called "academic contract" on QA and accreditation.

36. By "academic contract" we mean changes within the HE sector which takes the shape of Rousseau's "Social Contract" , in which the stakeholders of the HE sector agree on a new set of responsibilities and obligations. This new "academic contract" has to be understood as a "new paradigm" underpinning a new approach and understanding of QA in higher education for the third decade of the 21st Century. But if we are facing a real "new paradigm" or we are just involved in a different stage of the evolution of the Bologna process, is something that has to be acknowledged, and therefore labeled, when the consequences of the implementation of the new QA framework will be accomplished.

A changing landscape that requires a new approach on QA of HE

37. The first efforts to align the Romanian higher education system with the Bologna commitments (mostly concerning the ECTS and the three-level structure of the HE qualifications) were succeeded by the first attempts for external QA practices. These first attempts followed the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ESG) were adopted at the Bergen Bologna Follow-up Ministerial Conference in 2005 in Bergen (Norway) as the main tool for both HEIs and QA agencies in the EHEA.

38. Such a trajectory was typical for the young QA or accreditation agencies and bodies for the signing countries of the Bologna Declaration. The QA and accreditation practices carried out in these early years, together with the instructions derived from the Bologna's stakeholders meetings and working groups, were a formative element in the development of such national agencies. The stakeholders group was made up of the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Student's Union (ESU).

39. The approval of the ESG as the working tool for both internal and external QA at the EHEA level was a turning point for the QA organizations in Europe. Since that moment, QA bodies have to apply for the external review coordinated by ENQA to acquire full membership in the Association, and therefore be recognized within the EHEA as part of a trustworthy QA system. After the external review of the Romanian HE system conducted by the EUA between 2006 and 2007, ARACIS applied successfully for ENQA's coordinated external review for the first time in 2009. ARACIS renewed their membership after following reviews in 2013 and 2018.

40. The first attempts and efforts for coordinated external QA practices in the EHEA led by the European QA agencies, resulted in the first round of external reviews coordinated by ENQA in 2007 and the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) in 2008. Many higher education systems in the EHEA started to rethink their current QA frameworks regarding the institutional architecture higher education QA in their individual countries and the quest for a more effective and meaningful procedures. As a result, between 2012 and 2015, some national QA systems in the EHEA changed their "institutional architecture" in terms of QA bodies in charge of external evaluation to set up more coherent and efficient organizations. Moreover, these agencies shifted towards identifying the achievement of outcomes instead of focusing intensively on inputs and processes. These adjustments at the EHEA level resulted in an on-going change in the landscape of the QA bodies, as well as in the QA arrangements or procedures designed to set up the core principles of both internal and external QA of higher education.

41. The shift to a new generation of "external QA bodies" in the EHEA follows various trajectories:

- a merge of several organizations related to the task of external evaluation of higher education in a new QA body (such as in Ireland or Austria, where three bodies, HETAC, FETAC and the IUQB, and respectively the Accreditation Council, FHR and AQA were merged in a new agency)
- the creation of a new agency after a deep change and redefinition in the nature, scope and organization of the existing QA body to deal with the responsibilities derived from QA of higher education at the EHEA level (such as the transformation of the Swiss OAQ to AAQ in January 2015, or of the French AERES in the current Héres in November 2014)
- a deep change in the legal nature of the agency that has a small impact on the current QA and accreditation policies and procedures but a strong change in terms of its legal nature and responsibilities at the national level (such as the case of ANECA in Spain shifting from a private national foundation to a public state agency in December 2015).

42. These examples do not include all possible cases but they give a clear overview of the geographic-wide range of changes at the EHEA level. Although these changes at the organizational level of the QA bodies responded to internal and national reasons, all these agencies and the rest of QA bodies in the EHEA experienced changes in their processes and procedures showing the existence of a deep transformation in QA and accreditation practices. This transformation also reflected global dynamics of change in theory and methodology of QA practices worldwide.

The nature of the changes in European and worldwide QA

43. The main methodological changes in EHEA that have occurred from 2009 followed the evolution of awareness concerning quality and quality assurance in both the HEIs and the QA agencies. This evolution shows the maturity of the different stakeholders involved in QA practices after at least one round of external practices and came with a serious reflection about the impact of the external QA processes on the quality of higher education at the national level and, therefore, at the EHEA level.

44. HEIs all over Europe ran through a plethora of QA procedures led by the QA agencies after the adaptation of the individual national legal frameworks to the Bologna tools. The professionalization of QA of higher education on the side of the external agencies strengthened both self-awareness and responsibility of the HEIs on the internal QA policies and processes.

45. QA agencies improved the transparency of their evaluation tools, processes, evaluation committees and experts, the accountability of their resources, as well as the engagement of the manifold stakeholders of the HE sector (academic and administrative staff, students from universities and professional bodies, trade union representatives and employers).

46. ARACIS has not been oblivious to these QA environmental changes. As the self-evaluation reports for the ENQA external review from 2009 and 2013 clearly show, the Agency played an extremely important part in the adaptation of the Romanian HE system to the European Standards and Guidelines.

47. The experience of the European countries which underwent structural changes in their QA systems at the national level between 2012 and 2015 –United Kingdom, Ireland, Austria, Denmark, France and Spain– showed that the model developed in the early 2000s needed an update according to the particular evolution of QA practices and Bologna tools in the different European countries. The approval of the revised ESG in May 2015 at the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan (Armenia) proved that the model articulated in 2005 around the first version of the ESG had to be adapted to a new higher education setting in constant evolution.

48. This experience led to a shared understanding of the crucial point of this structural or “cultural” change: external evaluation (of both higher education programs and institutions) should be adapted to a more matured QA system by means of a simplification of the existing detailed and burdensome procedures for external QA. This new system demands:

- a risk-based approach distinguishing between different level of attainment of quality compliance among HEIs at the national level
- strengthening the balance between the internal QA management and systems of the HEIs and the external evaluation procedures of the QA bodies based on a shared responsibility between both parties
- a more tailored-led procedure according to the different profiles and missions of the HEIs (avoiding a one-size-fits-all procedure)
- a redefinition of the stakeholders roles and involvement in QA practices

49. QA should not be considered the responsibility of the external agency in charge anymore. It is part of the strategic axis of the university that needs to be implemented to respond the national QA regulations (or any other institutional or program international labels) and, above all, the internal QA self-requirements which can and probably should go beyond the minimum quality standard established by the national compulsory system.

50. Around Europe, the different national higher education systems are now thinking about means of reducing the external QA processes giving more autonomy and responsibility to the HEIs concerning their own QA management. After some countries completed the first cycle of external QA processes, they implemented the same approach through a risk-based analysis “rewarding” the HEIs which had made more efforts in terms of QA practices. Therefore, these agencies were capable to reduce the pressure of the external procedures to a set of minimum but core standards and indicators which could show that HEIs and their academic programs were being implemented accordingly, maintaining the regular procedure for those institutions and their academic programs which had not yet met the corresponding national level of achievement (benchmark).

51. The QA system sends a very powerful message to the HE sector: the QA system regulates itself at the level of maturity and shared responsibility between the different actors involved. The minimum standard level (“threshold level”) required to all HEIs and programs is ensured by the QA system at the national and international level. Thus, the minimum standard established by the system deals with two crucial responsibilities of what we have called the “new academic QA contract” or new paradigm between ARACIS and the HEIs: (i) student protection against inappropriate HE practices or providers and (ii) “protection to society” in terms of graduate quality achievement according to the level established by the national HE system.

52. ARACIS will play a critical role on behalf of the ministry in charge of higher education in Romania in ensuring that the minimum standard concerning institutional or program quality within the framework of the ESG will be attained. But the new approach on QA developed by ARACIS will show HEIs and higher education stakeholders that diversity of institutions (public, private, regional-oriented, international-focused, fully on-line, blended, etc.) will be respected. Each HEI will be considered individually according to its own QA record and trajectory with ARACIS external program and institutional evaluations since the beginning of the QA model in Romania.

53. This QA model also prevents the risk of defining a one-size-fits-all national framework, giving room to HEIs for taking the national benchmark on QA as far as each one wishes and work according to their own internal QA management system.

54. This shift towards a more “balanced” and “autonomous” QA paradigm for the HEIs where they are evaluated according to their individual record and circumstances within the national framework, must rest on a common denominator agreed on by all HEIs in the country: a strong Internal QA management put in place by every Romanian HEI, with a set of shared criteria/guidelines whose compliance should be based on each HEI’s performance and evidences.

55. A shared procedure is required to retrieve comparable and compatible data from identical indicators in order to feed the national data and statistics systems. Beyond the quantitative indicators, the Internal QA systems must promote and support institutional diversity. This balance might be difficult to achieve, but there are successful examples all over the EHEA that provide with good practices.

56. Strengthening internal QA mechanisms at HEI level is crucial for any further development of internal and external QA at the national level. Consequently, further major changes in the QA system should be based upon the existing dialogue between internal and external QA. In this sense, a shared and explicit quality culture within HEIs is crucial for these institutions to successfully respond not only to the national legal requirements concerning external QA, but also to any other discipline-oriented or institutional-based QA and accreditation labels awarded by international organizations.

57. The chapter devoted to the Internal QA system will show in detail the potential for institutional through the development of a “quality culture” at the university level. This “cultural change” also implies the evolution from a compliance-based approach on QA and accreditation towards an approach which considers QA and accreditation as an innovative-based driver aligned with the governance policy and strategy of the university.

The state of development of the Romanian QA system to face the new paradigm in QA management and policy

58. The change of paradigm in the HE system implies reforms with high political stakes. This change of paradigm in the Romanian HE came with the adaptation of the Bologna process which required massive system reforms through the past 10 years.

59. Contexts and traditions in HE systems are very significant in order to understand the way the Bologna tools have been adapted in the various European countries. The legal frameworks and traditions are also essential to analyze the implementation of a HE system to the EHEA.

60. A university is an almost “universal” cultural construct existing since centuries worldwide. But nowadays universities and the HE systems are closely related and highly dependent of their own legal contexts. For instance, a legal framework with a strong tradition on written legal sources subject to interpretations by judges on different jurisdictions will certainly have a particular reflection on the way the implementation of the ECTS at the program level by the HEIs or the use of the ESG by the national QA body and the HEIs will be accomplished. A legal framework with a focus on common and customary law with less or no written legal sources will have a different impact on the implementation of the Bologna tools.

61. A new paradigm in QA of HE in Romania will need to take into account the particular implementation of the Bologna process to the Romanian context and the way the legal framework had to be reformed and adapted to match the agreements assumed by the Ministers in the periodic Ministerial meetings that paves up the Bologna process since the first one in Bologna in 1999 to the last one in Paris in 2018, almost 20 years after the journey to set up the EHEA started.

62. If we take stock of the experiences acquired by the Romanian QA system in order to identify the current state of QA of HE in Romania for a shift to a new paradigm, we should distinguish between the experience gained by ARACIS, on the one side, and the Romanian HEIs, on the other side, in a process that necessary has to be jointly considered. This experience can be summarized as follows:

- ARACIS has a strong experience in the design and implementation of its own methodology through the different procedures put currently in place by the agency at the program and institutional level

- ARACIS has a long and sound expertise in dealing with experts for its evaluation procedures with different profiles: academic staff, administrative staff, students and representatives of the professional bodies and employers
- The training of experts gives ARACIS the possibility to act as a facilitator of the adaptation of the Bologna process to the Romanian setting
- The evaluations procedures where the experts take part are an important opportunity for all stakeholders to discuss and reflect on the Bologna process tools and mechanisms
- ARACIS has also contributed to spread out the philosophy and institutionalization of the EHEA's main stakeholders: EUA, ENQA, ESU, etc.
- The compliance with the ESG, shown in the three successful external reviews coordinated by ENQA, brings to the national context the debate about crucial elements of the Bologna declaration: independence of the agency, independence of judgments for evaluation panels and committees, accountability of public QA bodies and HEIs before taxpayers and society as a whole, etc.

63. On HEIs side we find institutions which contributed to the national QA system both individually and through the processes defined and implemented by ARACIS following the legal framework using their own resources and initiative. The experience acquired by HEIs could be summarized as follows:

- The governing bodies of the HEIs in Romania have assume the significant role played by a strategy of QA for their academic and research objectives and not only for the sake of compliance to the QA regulations
- HEIs have contributed to develop and implement formalized internal QA systems to respond to both their own management needs and the requirements of the external QA procedure run by ARACIS
- The academic staff of the Romanian HEIs have taken part in evaluation processes within the university and as part of the external evaluation panels, contributing to the awareness of a quality assurance policy at the institutional level
- This awareness is also embedded in the regular activities of the engaged academic staff and favor to spread the notion of QA for improvement rather than quality as a means of control or even bureaucracy
- The structure associated to QA in the HEIs defined by the law contributes to institutionalize QA within the university, as well as to identify a clear counterpart for ARACIS in the division of labor of external and internal QA
- Involving students in the QA processes contributes to a strengthen the awareness of students in the Bologna process and at the same time empower them as a relevant stakeholder of HE beyond the role of a "consumer", "user" or "customer" of higher education.

64. A new model start from the previous experience acquired by the Romanian HEIs, ARACIS and its evaluation experts have gathered since 2005 learning by doing implementing QA and accreditation processes. We need to talk about a second cycle of the "QA spiral" where enhancement-led QA procedures should be at the center of the model.

65. The institutional accreditation approach "evolved" from an institutional and program accreditation environment that focused on learning outcomes demanded by the Ministry towards a new stage. At this stage, the IQAS of the institutions are the fundamental axis underpinning the institutional accreditation, where program accreditation as a complementary procedure which avoids the potential reduplication of the procedures and unnecessary workload.

The core components of the new academic contract in QA management and policy

66. The construction of a methodology for the QA of higher education in Romania must be developed on the basis of the processes learned and implemented in the recent history of the country. The development of a strong IQAS within the HEIs certified through an external procedure will allow HEIs to assume a stronger autonomy in terms of internal QA. This initiative will also necessary have a positive impact on the external procedures, both at the institutional and program level.

67. Therefore, those Romanian HEIs which have accomplished the assessment of their IQAS by the existing QA framework up to 2019 are in a condition to face the new institutional evaluation procedure from a different perspective.

68. For those HEIs which are still in a situation where their IQAS have not been enough implemented and assumed by the university internal stakeholders as a strategic element of the institution, ARACIS, following a risk-based analysis, can concentrate the evaluation efforts on the internal QA management at that point for the institutional accreditation point of view.

69. The purpose of this approach is to strengthen internal quality assurance processes in HEIs and to ensure the existence of strategies, procedures and culture for quality assurance improvement. This process would contribute to encourage continuous improvement as part of the quality assurance process of higher education. The accreditation processes may end with a series of recommendations and an improvement plan for each institution, which could be defined between ARACIS and the HEI, and more than an imposition, it must be approached as a tool to promote quality.

70. This approach underpins a crucial understanding on QA Management for higher education: IQA management has to be part of the strategic plan and decision making process in each Romanian university. IQA management must be linked to the institutional strategy embedded in the institutional processes and in the teaching and learning, research, innovation and internationalization policies.

71. This paradigm has important effects on external QA: any enhancement reform or exercise towards a more efficient external QA paradigm will necessary rest on a collaborative and risk-based approach at the institutional level where the university will take care of its internal QA arrangements, regardless the national/regional/discipline-oriented requirements and expectations measured against a shared QA benchmark.

72. The development of an explicit Quality Culture within Romanian HEIs is both a reflection of, and dependent upon, the commitment of individuals, staff, students and senior management. Whilst on-going, daily actions are the basis of the “bottom-up” require senior management “top down” support, particularly through a clear quality-related, communication policy. In summary this must set out:

- the locus of primary responsibility for academic standards and the quality of teaching and learning
- the essential nature of reflecting on and integrating QA in all HEI activities
- the commitment to on-going internal quality review
- the aim of responding to external cyclical QA requirements largely through the outcomes of on-going internal quality review (as opposed to regarding these as additional ‘burdens’)
- the need for collection and collation of only essential data to provide evidence for QA decision making – with a shifting emphasis from ‘how well have we done?’ to “this shows how much we have improved”.

73. The process towards a Quality Culture is based largely on what HEIs are currently doing and achieving, but doing it with greater clarity, focus, efficiency and effectiveness. Staff will more easily see the beneficial impacts of their contributions, and that none of their efforts is “wasted”. Students and stakeholders will more readily see how their contributions help in enhancing the HEI’s reputation and the benefits they gain from this.

74. A “paradigm shift” is essential for a Quality Culture to develop. Quality must become integral to all aspects of the HEI’s work, not as an add-on to meet external demands but as a means of being able to show, individually and collectively. Quality assurance often appears to be driven by usually cyclical, “external demands”, with the recently added “burden” of also having to “show enhancement”; activities are predominantly reactive and often “closed”. By contrast, Quality Culture activities are proactive and open, and their focus is not on gathering (lots of) data but on identifying (just sufficient) information to best show how well (or not) activities achieve their aims. The emphasis shifts from “process” to “outcomes”.

75. The relationships between trust and making decisions determine, or is determined by, the nature of a family or an organization (whether collegiate or hierarchical). Clear communication (policy) is perhaps the most important aspect in the development and determination of that relationship, and essential to managing achievement of the HEI’s goal of a Quality Culture and celebrating its success.

76. The Quality Management System establishes the conditions for assuring and improving the quality of HEI's core activities, by focusing on:

- The establishment and development of a Quality Culture in both the academic and support services domains.
- Ensuring that all governing documents remain current, are easily available for use and are well understood
- Having formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic monitoring and review of programs and awards.
- Ensuring that the resources available for student learning support are adequate and appropriate for each program offered.
- Fostering research and innovation and nurturing intercultural engagement.
- Promoting QA and enhancement at departmental and institutional levels.
- Empowering staff in the implementation of QA systems, processes and procedures.
- Undertaking internal QA and quality enhancement reviews (of core activities) on a cyclical basis, with every activity being reviewed at least once every two years (using a review schedule and procedures that are clearly defined and published well in advance).
- Actively participating in External QA reviews of core activities on a cyclical basis (within the review schedules and procedures as prescribed by relevant external agencies).
- Supporting continuous quality monitoring and quality enhancement following the cyclical ADRI model (A – Approach [thinking and planning]; D – Deployment [implementing and doing]; R – Results [monitoring and evaluation]; I – Improvement [learning and adapting], or SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) model.
- Establishing systems that ensure timely collection and analysis of enough data to provide relevant information in support of effective and efficient management and decision making (particularly where links to the Core Activities).
- Clarifying where quality documents and outcomes are confidential in nature (and how and where these are maintained) but also how identified enhancement benefits may be disseminated across the HEI and externally.

77. This model should refer to a particular “QA architecture” adapted at each Romanian HEI according to its own strategy and organization, which could be deployed in three levels:

- Top level management in charge of the decision making process and the policy for IQA management;
- The organizational structure supporting the IQAS: a department, unit, office, bureau, etc. in charge of implementing the public IQA policy and the processes defined at the former level;
- An adapted procedure for the periodic evaluation of the IQAS through a “Toolkit for IQA management” developed by ARACIS, which is described in detail in the IQA chapter.

78. Even though these aspects are already included in the law concerning QA of higher education in Romania, it is important to adapt them to the current QA trends in the EHEA and worldwide. They should follow the success achieved in other European contexts such as Austria, Denmark or Spain, where IQA Management and systems have been thoroughly spread among the HEIs, reducing the focus and burden of the accreditation/QA procedure on those elements which are not clearly scrutinized in the IQA procedures, including achievement of learning outcomes, internationalization, governance, etc.

79. This approach moves away from the previous paradigm of a “one size fits all” external QA threshold or minimum compliance standard, allowing the agencies to pay a different attention to each particular university and sends a very clear message of an external QA mechanism institutional-targeted with added value. Finally, this approach stems with the current debate on internal versus external QA practices which is taking part at a global level as the latest agendas of the international QA networks in Europe, Asia-Pacific and Africa show.

1.5. The Methodology specificity for institutional evaluation in Romania

Responsive to the transformations of the Romanian higher education system

80. The **Methodology** considers, to various extents, the following aspects:

- I. **The diversity of higher education institutions**, resulting mainly from:
 - Changes in the institutional profile of traditional HEIs, especially through the diversification of study programs;
 - The coexistence of comprehensive, pluridisciplinary HEIs and HEIs focused on a more limited number of disciplines;
 - The coexistence of organizations managing study programs provided by foreign universities in various formulas, such as transnational or borderless;
- II. **The multiplication of program formulae** which ensure a “distributed learning”, based more on study programs and teaching staff mobility and on using information technology, in the following forms:
 - Establishment of territorial branches;
 - Distance learning programs, part time programs or other education forms approved by law.
- III. **The increase in higher education institutions complexity and size**, in terms of number of study programs and students, accompanied by certain challenges, such as:
 - The transformation of HEIs, from elitist universities into mass higher education institutions;
 - The maintenance and even strengthening of research performance requirements, while strengthening the requirements concerning teaching quality;
 - Challenges in recruiting young researchers and teaching staff, due to the non-competitive salary package;
 - Profound disparities, in terms of attractiveness, between different study programs and, implicitly, between sources and levels of financing from public and extra- budgetary funds;
 - The internationalisation of higher education, through the educational offer in foreign languages, attracting foreign students to university studies in Romania and by taking part in international research and education programs;
 - The challenges in identifying the labour market demands, to correlate learning outcomes with the expectations of a continuously growing category of employers.
- IV. **The gap between institutional requirements**, particularly in public institutions, regarding successful academic management and certain inadequate management practices:
 - The sometimes-challenging harmonization of central management with the management of faculties or departments, resulting in certain difficulties in allocating resources and in achieving objectives, which has had a negative influence on the institutional quality framework;
 - Failure to provide institutional homogeneity, which may have repercussions on the institutional profile of quality.
- V. **The promotion of best practice** identified in Romanian or foreign HEIs, to increase academic performance;
- VI. **The participation of Romania in the EHEA** and facing globalization are increasing the competitive pressure on a constantly growing higher education market.

Applying for the provisional authorization, accreditation and periodic evaluations

81. To apply for provisional authorization, accreditation periodic evaluation, following steps must be complete:

- a. The provisional authorization to operate of new Licence (*1st Cycle*) /Master (*2nd Cycle*) Degree²¹

²¹ Licence Degree (in Romanian “Licenta”) corresponds to Bachelor’s Degree.

- study programs initiated and proposed by accredited higher education institutions;
 - b. The provisional authorization to operate for higher education providers which initiate Licence Degree study programs and for the Licence/Master Degree study programs they initiate;
 - c. The accreditation of Master Degree awarding institutions (MDAI) and of the Master studies fields (*domains*);
 - d. The periodic evaluation of the accredited higher education institutions, of the accredited study programs and of the master studies fields (*domains*).
82. The evaluation of the third cycle of university studies, organized in doctoral studies, shall be conducted in compliance with a specific distinct procedure, which will be drafted in compliance with the regulations in force.

Valid for internal and external evaluations

83. According to the legislation in force, the achievement and evaluation of quality have both an external and an internal dimension.
- **The external dimension** is provided under the Bologna Process, which is based on a programmatic document (the “Bologna Declaration”, 1999) adopted by all Education Ministers of the member states and under the Communiqués further signed by the Ministers in charge with higher education in the EHEA. The rigorous implementation of the list of provisions established at European level includes the listing of the national agencies for quality assurance, ARACIS included, in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR. Moreover, the fact that Romanian HEIs are part of the European Higher Education Area provides confidence in quality and a strengthened basis for the academic/professional recognition of Romanian diplomas.
 - **The internal dimension of academic quality** builds upon the legislation in force, depending on the specificity of each HEI, and on the tradition and cultural heritage of our higher education system. This is the full responsibility of each HEI/education program provider. From this perspective, quality assurance becomes a process that is adapted to the existing institutional specificity and a mechanism for continuously improving academic performance or outcomes. Each HEI will have, mandatorily, a structure for quality assurance, as provided by the law, for drafting, monitoring and updating quality assurance policies.

Targeting three main categories of users

84. ARACIS is targeting three main categories of users:
- A. Representatives of Romanian education providers and higher education institutions:
 - i. HEIs - rectors and vice-rectors, deans and vice-deans, heads of departments, members of academic communities made up of students, academics, scientific researchers and administrative staff;
 - ii. namely all those whose activities contribute to shaping and developing the academic quality.
 - B. Commissions and other structures directly responsible for quality management in HEIs or with the external evaluation of quality;
 - C. Higher education beneficiaries, namely students, employers and, in a broader sense, society.

Quality principles for higher education in Romania

85. The Romanian Quality assurance system fully complies with the requirements of the European Higher Education Area as per quality assurance, and notably with the **European references** - the Romanian higher education system and institutions belong to the EHEA and ensure quality levels, corresponding to the requirements of this area and competitive at European and international levels. As per the Communiqué adopted in the 2015 Yerevan Conference by the Ministers in charge with higher education of the countries signing the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe, which are EHEA partners, the ESG are applicable to the entire higher education of the EHEA, irrespective of the place or way it is provided.
86. The Methodology complies with the recommendations of ENQA, following the review of ARACIS in 2018. **ESG focuses on quality assurance with respect to learning and teaching in higher education,**

including the learning environment and the relevant connections with research and innovation. Moreover, institutions have policies and processes for assuring and improving their own activities, such as scientific research of institution management.

87. **The institutional responsibility for the quality of education.** Higher education institutions are the 1st responsible for ensuring and improving the quality of education;

88. **The importance of the “quality culture”** - seen as a consistent approach permeating all activities undertaken in the institution. The quality culture expects that policies and mechanisms are in place to protect the student, support the academic and nonacademic staff in their efforts to improve the quality of the programmes and of the research, provide a learning environment propitious to successful learning and development.

89. **Institutional diversity.** The diversity of the institutions, of their missions and objectives is respected and encouraged by means of external evaluation of quality.

90. **Cooperation with all educational system stakeholders.** The approach, the practices applied, and the forms of technical assistance provided by ARACIS are based on cooperation and mutual confidence in its relationships with higher education institutions and other partners.

91. **Focus on results.** In quality assurance and evaluation, learning outcomes and university research performance, seen as a component of the education process, are essential.

92. **Institutional identity.** Learning and research outcomes and performance can be achieved through a variety of practices, methods or structures, autonomously designed and implemented by each institution, according to its own options. In this respect, ARACIS assessments focus mostly on outcomes and performances, without neglecting the influence of best practices and successful structures in the field of academic quality.

93. **Quality improvement.** Continuous quality and institutional management improvement are the main goals of the external evaluation.

94. **Transparency.** The results of all external evaluations are concretized in reports, which are public documents, as part of the public responsibility of ARACIS and, respectively of the HEI. The findings of the evaluation, after the complaints resolution procedures are completed, include judgments and advises, which are made public and communicated to the Ministry of National Education.

Lesson learned from the “Study on European best practices for external quality assessment of higher education institutions”²²

95. Beyond the formal processes for internal QA and external QA, there is a key factor identified in the extensive literature on quality assurance that allows mature quality assurance systems to operate reliably: **trust**. In most contexts, when the outcomes of a process are mutually beneficial to stakeholders, trust is a prerequisite for ensuring that actions taken to determine the outcomes were performed fairly. In contexts where it is clear that the outcomes are not guaranteed to be mutually beneficial, trust is likewise necessary, both as a prerequisite for the process, and after the outcomes are known to all stakeholders.

96. In the context of building trust, ARACIS should consider exploring opportunities to collaborate on research with universities and student organizations in Romania. Trust-based relations and collaboration between the QA agency and HEIs would strengthen the higher education system and, ultimately, the HEIs. The portals created by AQU Catalonia and NOKUT are two examples to consider as foundational elements of collaboration.

97. QA systems must evolve over time. The growth of higher education globally has contributed to the need for QA agencies and stakeholders to consider the next step for QA in their respective contexts. In the European context, the ESG has been a critical step for establishing a common set of guidelines and principles.

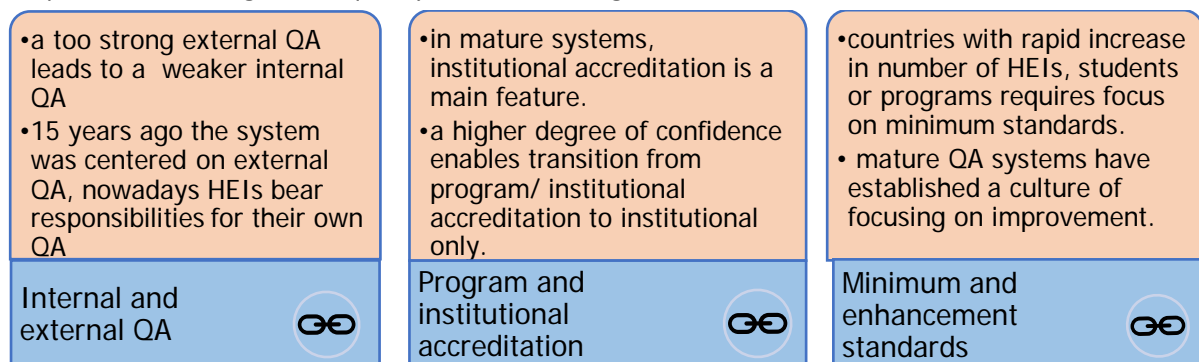
²² Study on European best practices for external quality assessment of higher education institutions – World Bank, December 2017

98. The strong history of higher education in Europe has led to European HEIs partnering with peer HEIs globally. In the European context, the growth of cross-border higher education prompts the need for cross-border QA. Cross-border QA refers to “external QA activities of a QA agency carried out in a country other than the one in which it is based or primarily operates.” NVAO cited cross-border QA as being the next challenge on the horizon for its agency. Cross-border QA may be particularly challenging in large higher education sectors with several HEIs with global partnerships, and in sectors where there are large HEIs with a rich history of strong study programs and research. As a result, another pair of polarities is likely to emerge for the next step of QA in Europe: national higher education and cross-border higher education.

99. Strike the right balance. Romania has focused on external QA procedures but according to the ESG, the primary responsibility for QA rests with HEIs. As a result, there is a need to strengthen and balance both internal QA and external QA processes. In mature systems, institutional accreditation is a main feature of the higher education sector. In Romania, ARACIS provides a combined approach of program and institutional accreditation for both public and private HEIs. Based on a higher degree of confidence, accreditation in higher education can transition from program and institutional accreditation to institutional accreditation only. Countries that experienced rapid increases in the number of HEIs and higher education programs are relevant to use QA systems based on standards. Considering the maturity of a QA system, the approach should look at the interdependence between minimum standards—emerging from purpose—and standards intended to enhance QA agencies and HEIs.

100. The study, “Quality Assurance in European Higher Education: Using Polarities to Compare Sound Practices in External Quality Assurance in Select Systems” prepared by the WB team used the Polarity Management approach. Polarities are interdependent pairs of concepts which reciprocally support each other and need to be managed over time, present in individuals, teams, organizations, and systems.

Main polarities investigated in quality assurance in higher education :



101. Using polarities as criteria to compare QA systems, several conclusions have emerged: good QA systems in Europe are managing polarities well; QA cannot be scaled from one context to another; legal frameworks are critical to the operational activities of QA agencies; insufficient budgets are viewed as a constraint that cripples action instead as a trigger that brings transformation ; participate in professional development activities as observers in evaluation procedures at peer QA agencies as individuals or teams to gain understanding of similar systems; collaborate with universities and student organizations in the context of building trust; reconsider the role of HEIs as primary responsible for QA.

Chapter 2 - Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation

Introduction

102. In order to comply with the principles described before, the Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation is flexible in its application, consistent with engagements of the Romanian government in the Bologna Process, and comprehensive enough to allow each Romanian institution to demonstrate its continuous efforts and positioning in the Romanian higher education arena and beyond.

103. The present document is the result of discussions and reviews with ARACIS and the higher education sector. It has resulted in a specific approach fitting with the needs of the higher education sector in terms of quality assurance. Such approach is presented below.

Approach to the Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation

104. The Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation put an emphasis on:

- The inclusion of any student in Romanian higher education.
- The role that academic staff, students and the representatives of the economic environment have in developing the institution development strategy brings the Romanian higher education system closer to the objectives of meetings the needs of society and of the evolution of the national and international labour markets.
- The need for higher education institutions of Romania to be recognized at regional, national level as poles of excellence in vocational training, based on the results and skills of graduates, is obvious.
- The instrumental role of international quality assurance to safeguard and continuously improve the quality of the programmes, research and services. For instance, increasing the role of quality assurance departments in monitoring and periodic review of study programs to best meet students' needs and society.
- The rebalance of teaching and learning quality vis-à-vis the research. Although international reputation lies in the scientific excellence of institutions, there is a strong need to improve the relevance of the programmes as per the socioeconomic needs and to support the pedagogy of the teaching staff (academic or not) as well as the capacity of students to learn better and progress.
- The key role of the services in the implementation of the institutional strategy and policies. Between academic staff and students, the services allow the institution to deliver high quality education and accommodate students and academic staff needs.

The structure of the Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation

105. **Six domains for quality** are suggested to reflect the key missions and quality expectations of any Romanian higher education institutions:

D1. Strategy and governance

D2. Quality assurance system

D3. The curriculum

D4. Teaching, learning and assessment

D5. Research support

D6. Student and their support

106. For each domain, a set of quality standards, which are the quality expectations to be fulfilled by any Romanian institution, is listed. These quality standards are featured below:

<p>D1. Strategy and Governance</p>	<p>S1.1_The institution's vision and strategic plan are in alignment with its mission. The institution has adequate policies, processes, procedures and instruments to realize its mission and implement its strategic plans.</p> <p>S1.2_Personnel and students and other stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the institution's strategy.</p> <p>S1.3_The institution contributes to the social, economic and cultural development of the territory on which it is located and at the national level.</p> <p>S1.4_There is a clear and transparent division of responsibilities, duties and authorities among the governing/leading authorities and decision-making bodies, personnel (academic and non-academic staff) and according to the expected qualifications.</p> <p>S1.5_Students are involved in the administrative and decision-making processes and are incentivized to engage in the institution's strategy and management.</p> <p>S1.6_Institution pursues an open strategy of collaboration and partnership at a regional, national, European and international level.</p>
<p>D2. Quality Assurance System</p>	<p>S2.1_The quality management/assurance system is developed with clearly-defined structures, objectives, processes and procedures,</p> <p>S2.2_The institution designs and implements policies with the objective of assuring, preserving and improving quality, especially for human resources, learning environment (infrastructures, equipment) and financial resources.</p>
<p>D3. The Curriculum</p>	<p>S3.1_The institution ensures that new and existing programmes reflect the needs of society and are continually adapted to societal development and the changing needs of the Romanian and regional, and international labour market as well as societal needs.</p> <p>S3.2_The institution ensures that programmes have an appropriate level (short cycle/Ba/M/Doctorate, vocational, Life Long Learning), an academic content and an educational quality that supports students' learning and the achievement of programme objectives.</p> <p>S3.3_The institution ensures its capacity to run the programmes efficiently regarding its human resources and learning environment).</p> <p>S3.4_Clear goals and information are defined for each study programme and are communicated to students and stakeholders.</p>
<p>D4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment</p>	<p>S4.1_The curriculum design, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and review processes are in alignment with national requirements and the institution's vision and strategy.</p> <p>S4.2_The institution has and uses mechanisms to ensure that outcomes (of learning, employment and the satisfaction of the different interest groups) can be measured, analysed and used for the enhancement of the quality of programmes</p> <p>S4.3_The institution has mechanisms to ensure that the hiring, management and professional development of its teaching staff is carried out with the necessary guarantees to ensure they can fulfil the requirements according to their corresponding functions.</p>

	<p>S4.4_The institution ensures the quality of exchange programs and international mobility (students, teachers, staff) and promotes mobility at all levels. Specific quality assurance mechanisms are in place for mobility.</p> <p>S4.5_The institution complies with quality criteria specific to joint programmes.</p> <p>S4.6_The institution offers opportunities for any student's educational and professional needs to pursue, stop and resume the study programmes.</p> <p>S4.7_The institution has a clear policy regarding the assessment of student's achievements (academic and work placement and other learning outcomes a gained through the study programmes) as well as the accumulation and transfer of credits, so that the assessment is fair, equitable, understood by the students and in line with the pedagogical approach of the institution.</p> <p>S4.8_The institution brings to the forefront and supports projects of pedagogical innovation and excellence in order to improve the integration of graduates and to strengthen the capacity for innovation by setting up innovative and employable courses.</p>
D5. Research Support	<p>S5.1_The institution ensures that the research projects contribute to and guarantee a high level of scientific quality in a relevant research area.</p> <p>S5.2_The institution ensures the dynamism of national and international development of its research policy as well as the valorisation and dissemination of its results.</p> <p>S5.3_There is an institutional strategy and programming of research activities</p> <p>S5.4_The institution promotes research and scientific activity in programmes teaching where relevant.</p> <p>S5.5_The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivise, assess and reward research engagement.</p> <p>S5.6_The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivise, assess, reward research engagement and foster the production and valorisation of research.</p>
D6. Students and their Support	<p>S6.1_Admission, progression requirements and student evaluation methods are clear, manageable and publicly made available.</p> <p>S6.2_Mechanisms for student support and advice are established for successful accomplishment, continuation of studies and career preparation/job placement-orientation.</p> <p>S6.3_The institution ensures inclusiveness of any kind of student admitted.</p> <p>S6.4_The institution has a supportive policy to extra-curriculum activities and rewards the engagement of students.</p>

107. For each quality standards, a set of criteria is proposed. The criteria are to be used by the institution to demonstrate the level of fulfilment of the quality standards. The institution might propose other criteria that reflect its specificities. The list of criteria is not prescriptive, but using criteria is advised to assess the quality standard. For clarity, explanations and illustrations are presented underneath the criteria, in italics.

108. At the bottom of each quality standard and their criteria, a list of evidence shows the kind of documents might be analysed and annexed by the institution to demonstrate the level of achievement of the quality standards. Like for the criteria, the list of evidence presented is not exclusive, but illustrative.

109. Then, the list of indicators proposed by ARACIS for INFO-TOOL is annexed, as a good basis for documenting the achievement of the quality standards.

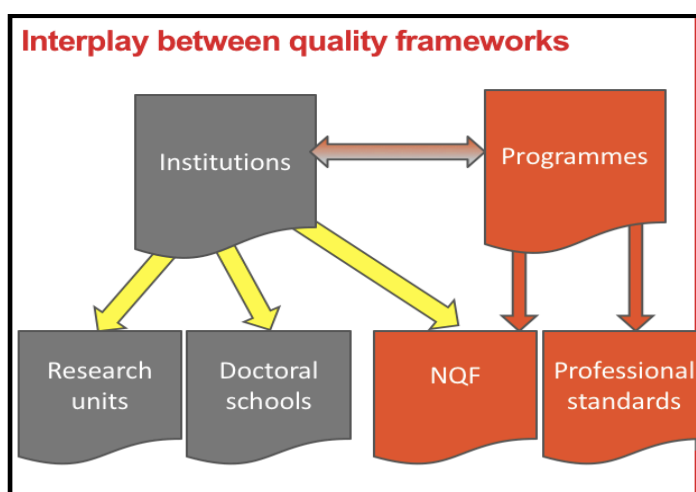
110. Note that the Internal Quality Assurance manual will further present how to conduct the self-evaluation and use these Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation.

The interplay between the different evaluation frameworks

111. The Quality Assurance Standards for Institutional Evaluation is the umbrella framework to be used by the institution for the self-evaluation of the whole institution and by the external evaluators for the evaluation run by ARACIS.

112. There are quality standards specific to the programmes that ARACIS provides. They refer to professional standards (defined by Romanian experts of the domain and by international standards for regulated professions such as medical education) as well as the National Qualification Framework. In addition, there will be quality standards specific to the doctoral schools and research units, that will further specify the quality standards related to research activities. The Quality Assurance Standards for Institutional Evaluation focus on institutional policies and not on the evaluation of laboratories, researchers or doctoral education.

113. The Quality Assurance Standards for Institutional Evaluation is compatible with any framework. It also respects the European Standards for Quality Assurance to which any institution of a country signatory of the Bologna Process is expected to adhere.



114. The main objectives of the revision of the quality framework is assist the higher education institution in fostering internal quality assurance for the benefit of continuous improvement of quality and to improve the relevance of the external quality assurance overseen by ARACIS. The Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation has been designed and structured to trigger the ownership of the academic community, the external experts and the ARACIS.

Terminology of Quality Standards

115. **The Methodology** uses the terminology and the concepts established under the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as further amended, and will be further developed by ARACIS, in compliance with the legal provisions, in order to strengthen its practical nature and better serve the beneficiaries in connection with the activities carried out by HEIs and their concrete requirements.

116. The terminology below is used for the common understanding of the Quality Standards for institutional evaluation. A Glossary of terms is included in the present Framework.

Domain	Domains are the major areas of the quality assurance system that are subject to evaluation.
Standard	Standards indicate the expected level of requirements and conditions by which quality is assessed or that must be achieved by higher education institutions and their programs for accreditation or certification. To correctly judge whether a particular quality standard is met or not, a standard must be formulated clearly and explicitly and linked to specific criteria, which can be divided into (more operational) indicators/guidelines.

Domain	Domains are the major areas of the quality assurance system that are subject to evaluation.
Criteria/ guidelines (as per ESG wording)	<p>Criteria are control/guiding points/lines that determine the realisation/fulfilment of the standards.</p> <p>The criteria detail the requirements and conditions to be met to reach the standard and provide the quantitative and qualitative basis on which an evaluative conclusion is drawn.</p>
Evidence	<p>Evidence is the data used to determine the performance level of a standard, which is the acceptable level of performance. Evidence can be either qualitative or quantitative.</p> <p>They must be collected regularly. To do this, the institution is encouraged to provide empirical data, for example by developing a statistical system.</p>

2.1. Domains, Standards and Criteria

D1. Strategy and governance

117. **S1.1_The institution's vision and strategic plan are in alignment with its mission. The institution has adequate policies, processes, procedures and instruments to realize its mission and implement its strategic plans.**

Criteria:

1. The institution has set and published a mission statement.
2. The institution's strategies and policies comply with the mission statement.
3. The strategy of the Institution is implementable and in consistency with the national development priorities.
4. The institution ensures the consistency of institutional and faculty/department strategies with a view to preventing conflicts.
5. The institution assures equal opportunities for development and improvement between different units (faculty, departments, programmes).
6. The institution has and ensures the establishment of mechanisms that ensure the implementation of the charter of values and its proper functioning.
7. The institution has an action plan, based on priorities and broken down into monitoring indicators.
8. Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensible, integrated and appropriate to the institution.
9. The institution has installed structures of supervision and internal evaluation.
10. The institution periodically monitors and evaluates its missions, objectives and achievements by assessing their relevance to the evolution of the institution and its external environment.
11. The institution has a system of periodic review of its action plan, taking into account the results of the evaluations.
12. Academic freedom, diversity, research and teaching, as well as corporate responsibility, are encouraged and help to accomplish the institution's mission and purpose.

How to understand the quality standards and criteria?

The mission is the likely future the institution aims to reach it is its "raison d'être" within the national orientations for higher education in Romania.

The institution's strategy is drafted in accordance with its mission and purpose. The strategy sets specific objectives (e.g. become a recognised world-class university, training workforce for local enterprises, allowing Romanian students to pursue their education in any European institution...).

To implement the strategy, the institution sets objectives for short, medium, and long-term development (e.g. Improving international mobility to equip Romanian students to globalised societies and trigger international cooperation in research and business) and designs action plans for their operationalization (e.g. Setting an International Office, providing linguistic courses to any outgoing/ingoing students, inviting foreign academics, fostering an international campus life). The objectives formulated by the institution can be traced back to its overall strategy and development plans.

To operate, the institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts and finds external funding.

The institution is able to keep track of the implementation of its mission, strategies and action plans, thanks to mechanisms (feedback surveys, annual retreat with the community for instance. The institution assesses the impacts of its strategy and demonstrates by verifiable means the achievement of objectives. The institution has documents that confirm its performance in implementing the results of its planning.

The institutions make sure the faculties and departments are treated according to fair and known rules (e.g. on budget allocation). The institution ensures the enforcement of charter of values and has arrangements to remediate to any misconduct by individuals.

The institution pays attention to preserving the academic freedom and has policies and mechanisms in place so that: academics are not influenced or biased by any pressure external to their activities.

The institution demonstrates its social implication towards the communities, for instance by providing services to the peoples in needs, sharing equipment with local companies.

118. S1.2_Personnel and students and other stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the institution's strategy.

Criteria:

1. Academic staff are involved in internal debate under institutional procedures prescribed by statute.
2. The governance system takes into consideration the views and comments of students, as stakeholders, in the areas in which students have a direct and reasonable interest (training, student affairs).
3. All personnel – teaching and non-teaching – are actively involved in the institution's -strategy (design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation). They are aware and work towards achieving the goals established by the institution.
4. External stakeholders (employers, experts, authorities...) are consulted and engaged in the design of the institutional strategy or part thereof (e.g. internationalization strategy).

How to understand the quality standards and criteria?

There are mechanisms to consult and include the opinion of a vast range of actors internal and external to the institution, with a view to improving the relevance of the strategy and facilitates its implementation. The institution should also make sure the strategy is a living document, not a declaration of intention: regular updates and communication on progress made are key and should also involve the internal and external stakeholders.

The institution incentivises student participation and provides training, so they actively engage in institutional, faculty and department-level governance structures and decision-making, as well as with consultative bodies.

119. **S1.3_The institution contributes to the social, economic and cultural development of the territory on which it is located²³ and at the national level.**

Criteria:

1. The institution is well represented or actively involved in professional associations and associations or platforms for teaching and research.
2. The institution is actively and regularly involved in local or regional socio-cultural initiatives.
3. Staff participate in collaborative initiatives developed with external partners.
4. The institution develops, participates in and manages service projects for the development or social assistance community.
5. Service, development or social service projects are actively used in teaching and provide impulses and ideas for research.
6. Students engage in projects with societal or regional impact.

How to understand the quality standards and criteria?

The institution is a driver to socioeconomic and cultural development of its region and the country as a whole. There are many ways to contribute to the development that goes beyond the training of students and the research activities. For instance, academics cooperate with innovators, the institution provides courses on entrepreneurship to students, and the institution supports incubators. Internships are organised in public services (e.g. Faculty of nursing with local hospitals).

Incentives might be offered to students to set up NGOs or be part of initiatives meant to improve their knowledge, skills and sense of responsibility and citizenship. The institution may engage in national debates such as the gender-based society or regulation of migrations.

The institution is also a cultural actor, that can diffuse and share knowledge and ideas on its territory and internationally.

120. **S1.4_There is a clear and transparent division of responsibilities, duties and authorities among the personal (academic and non-academic staff), according to the expected qualifications.**

Criteria:

1. The institution has the decision-making structures and bodies at all levels, which have their specific organisation and their powers and competencies.
2. Academic staff, administrative staff, students, etc. have opportunities to participate in management and decision-making processes, related to planning, resource allocation, program and curricular development.
3. There is coordination among faculties and departments within the institution.
4. The management system includes mechanisms of planning, development and continuous improvement, risk assessment, activity assessment of units and their interaction.
5. The institution has a clear allocation of staff duties, delimitation of responsibilities of collegial bodies. Inst has established a transparent system of information and communication (internet, portals, emails etc.) with students, staff and stakeholders.

How to understand the quality standards and criteria?

The institution has put in place the organisation chart, has description of duties and responsibilities of staff (academic or not) as well as students. All know about the decision-making process rules.

²³ Names « regional » in that evaluation framework. Regional might therefore be local (like municipalities).

Debates are prepared, moderated and brings out minutes. The transparency of decision-making is key to a well-functioning institution and ensures the buy-in of the community.

121. S1.5_Students are involved in the administrative and decision-making processes and are incentivized to engage in the institution's strategy and management.

Criteria:

1. Students are represented in governing bodies of the institution, structures of teaching-research and services.
2. Student Councils express opinions and proposals for all problems of general interest of the institution as educational plans and research programmes, study regulations, etc.
3. The institution supports student councils and finances their activities.

How to understand the quality standards and criteria?

Students are effectively represented, according to transparent regulations. There are mechanisms ensuring that the students voice counts for decision-making process (e.g. student representative at department level).

The institution shows how student democracy is incentivized (e.g. through training of student representatives) and rewarded (e.g. through credits).

122. S1.6_Institution pursues an open strategy of collaboration and partnership at a regional, national and international level.

Criteria:

1. Institution determines its cooperation policy priorities with the relevant stakeholders, either local, national or international. The stakeholders might be higher education institutions, companies, public authorities, and civil social organisations.
2. Cooperation strategy is reflected in long-term strategy of institution development as well as the regional, national and international development strategies.
3. Institution takes into account the needs of regional economy and labour market for opening new programmes or drafting scientific research projects.
4. Institution collaborates with regional partners in the framework of cooperation strategy implementation.
5. Institution collaborates with other institutions to provide services to students that help them succeed in their studies, professional and personal development.
6. The Institution has defined objectives in teaching, learning, research, internationalisation, governance and relationship to the society that fit into the national and regional context.
7. The institution has a strategy with regard to the development of society that fits into the institutional profile. Conversely, the institution's profile in teaching, learning, research, and services fit into the regional, national and international context.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

The institution demonstrates it is a forward-looking institution, open to learn from other academics how to best improve programmes and research. The institution makes choices on cooperation and mobility, select areas or countries, and sees internationalisation as a level to quality of programmes and research.

Openness should at the same time occur at local level (communes, regions) with the socioeconomic actors, and other education providers. The institution has a strategy to seek added value from others and to provide support so that, together, they develop the synergies. The institution may carry out diagnosis for the territory and provide high-level expertise in many domains.

Like for internationalisation, and in order to avoid dispersion, a strategy for local cooperation should be in place.

The institutions demonstrate that the strategy for local and international development is in full harmony with the mission, and the institution-wide strategy as featured above.

Box 1 - Evidence for the quality standard on governance and strategy

- Description of the competencies of the institution in relation to its supervisory authority;
- Organisational structure and assignment of responsibilities within the institution;
- Organisational chart of the institution and faculties and departments;
- Mission and strategic plan of the HE institution (including regional and international);
- Progress reports on sociocultural activities and dissemination of scientific research or organisation of high-level debates;
- Description of methods for providing information about the HE institution's activities according to the target group;
- Description of measures in place for the updating of data;
- Sample descriptions of programmes and of supporting means for the presentation of activities;
- Annual report;
- External evaluation reports;
- Website.

D2. Quality assurance system

123. **S2.1_A quality management system is developed with clearly defined objectives, policies and procedures in order to promote a quality assurance culture and ensuring quality of the institution's activities (teaching, research, services to the society).**

Criteria:

1. The quality assurance policy covers all elements of the institution's activities.
2. The quality assurance policy is institutionalised and operationalized into structures and clearly defined into appropriate, effective and efficient mechanisms and methods).
3. The internal quality assurance system is enforced at all levels across the institution.
4. The institution defines quality standards for its central processes and for the products or objectives it uses or implements, notably in teaching, research, internationalisation, cooperation and services to the society.
5. The appropriate stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the quality assurance policy
6. The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its planning and evaluation activities on an on-going basis, in order to further enhance the implementation of the quality assurance policy.
7. The information gathered by or from students, alumni, employers and other stakeholders are used for quality improvement.
8. The institution puts in place clear, controlled and shared procedures for key processes.
9. Corrective actions are systematically implemented when dysfunctions or non-conformities are detected as a result of assessments or complaints.
10. The institution uses data and analysis to document its decision.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

The institution demonstrates that there is an institutional commitment for quality assurance (for directorate, deans, department leaders) proving that the institution is self-regulating its activities.

The institution defines its own quality assurance strategy, which contains the elements of an internal quality assurance system aimed at ensuring:

- *The quality of the activities of the higher education institution;*
- *Their long-term quality development*
- *The promotion of the development of a quality culture.*

The quality assurance system is incorporated into the strategy of the institution and efficiently supports its development. The institution periodically analyses the relevance of its quality assurance system and make the necessary adjustments. The institution has a regular practice of internal evaluation.

The institution has set appropriate mechanisms and assigns the right staff. The institution has set up a quality assurance unit at institutional level, assigned quality assurance focal points in faculties and departments.

The collection of information should be purposeful and for the sake of a reflection or a decision, otherwise the informants solicited might not buy-in to the institution (e.g. results of students' surveys should be analysed and reported).

The institution systematically documents its decisions, either strategic or operational. It is key to make sure that a shift in a strategy results from the analysis of a situation (e.g. change of orientation of the countries targeted for international partnerships following the analysis of the current partnership agreements).

124. S2.2_The institution designs and implements policies with the objective of preserving and improving quality, especially for human resources, learning environment (infrastructures, equipment) and financial resources.

Criteria:

1. The institution ensures, through needs analysis and managerial arrangements, the necessary financial resources in the short and long term.
2. The institution or part of it (faculty, departments) conducts evaluations of governance and management, policies for teaching, research, internationalisation, and cooperation and for services to the society, among other domains, on a regular basis and takes subsequent decisions.
3. For human resources management, the institution has defined, selected and made available human resources and appropriate tools.
4. The institution provides and manages adequate premises for implementing the study programs and research activities, according to its mission and strategies.
5. The institution provides students and staff with all the resources required for training and research work (access to documentation, syllabi...)
6. The IT infrastructure is managed efficiently and is permanently maintained in a proper operating state.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

Quality assurance should be devoted to the organisational and financial aspect of the teaching, learning and research. This is a priority for Romanian institutions, otherwise many quality standards could not be fulfilled if resources are not properly managed and enhanced.

The institution secures sufficient revenue and its budget is clearly and transparently planned and covers all costs incurred. Distribution of financial resources and their use are in accordance with the rules and standards of budgetary programming and public financial management. The institution sets up the special structure for its financial management and financial policy implementation. The institution pursues a transparent policy for distribution of financial resources. The institution analyses indicators from monitoring of financial policy implementation.

The learning environment should correspond to the mission and the strategies of the institution. For instance, introducing project-based learning will require specific classroom arrangements; fostering incoming mobility will require dedicated support to foreign students.

Box 2 - Evidence for the quality standard on quality assurance

- Policy statements on QA;
- Documents showing how the ESG Part I are implemented;
- Composition and activity report of the quality assurance unit;
- Description of the measures introduced in order to ensure a good understanding of quality assurance processes and results;
- Descriptions of data collection and analysis systems (responsibilities, indicators, technical resources etc.);
- Examples of the systematic use of the quantitative and qualitative data produced by the system;
- Legislation and regulations that establish participative bodies and their operating terms and conditions;
- Processes for appointments to senior management roles;
- Examples of detailed job descriptions;
- Documents explaining decision-making processes in detail;
- Examples of changes in organisation and decision-making processes subsequent to the monitoring of strategic objectives;
- Description of the resources placed at the disposal of participatory bodies and representatives (premises, resources, internal and external channels of communication, administrative support, discharge etc.).

D3. The Curriculum

125. **S3.1_The institution ensures that new and existing programmes reflect the needs of society and are continually adapted to societal development and the changing needs of the Romanian and regional, and international labour market as well as societal needs.**

Criteria:

1. The institution has an overall strategy, and the study program's qualification objectives have been developed in accordance with it. The national legal requirements regarding the study program's establishment have been observed.
2. Study programmes are drafted in such a way that students have opportunities for employment, professional and personal development, documented by a feasibility study or any means demonstrating the current and future needs of the job market and the society.
3. The learning outcomes approach is being implemented incrementally at programme level.
4. Study programmes reflect the needs of the labour market and stipulate the competences to be acquired by students.
5. Study programmes aim to provide students with specialised and interdisciplinary knowledge, as well as professional, methodological and general competence.
6. The institution collaborates with the socio-economic world to explore its needs and upgrades regularly the program contents.
7. The institution accommodates the appropriate learning environment (physical and virtual) including premises and equipment.
8. The institution has specific arrangements and process for the introduction of new programmes (design, validation, revision).
9. The institution assesses regularly and through specific arrangements, the objectives, content, delivery modes and student assessment of the programmes and the impacts on the students learning. The institutions assess the changes of the market and job training matching and

provide evidence of student success and of programme effectiveness as well as staff experience.

How to understand the Quality standard and the criteria?

The study programme pursues specific qualification objectives.

These objectives cover professional and extraprofessional or interdisciplinary aspects and refer in particular to the domain of academic competences, competences necessary for a qualified employment, skills of social commitment and those of personal development.

The institution should therefore demonstrate how the design, update and implementation of the programme is achieved along with these objectives. For instance, how academics and employers work together in the design of teaching modules and how the internship is supervised.

The institution explains how it concretely mobilise relevant external stakeholders, including potential employers and graduates, via a continuous dialogue on programmes, including their objectives, content and results.

126. S3.2_The institution ensures that programmes have an appropriate level (short cycle/Ba/M/Doctorate, vocational, Life Long Learning), an academic content and an educational quality that supports students' learning and the achievement of programme objectives.

Criteria:

1. Study programmes are offered in line with Bologna Process in successive cycles under the system: Bachelor, Master, Doctorate and ensures the continuity of content of study programs across the different levels (bachelor's, master's, doctorate degrees, additional education), based on academic interdependence of disciplines and transversality.
2. The curriculum is organised to help seamless student progress (e.g. modularisation, Recognition of Prior Learning).
3. Study programmes are designed to facilitate students' mobility and ensure transfer and recognition of credits.
4. The institution offers specific study programmes (e.g. short-term specialisations) as a form of lifelong learning.
5. Study programmes are organised to meet the needs of different categories of students such as:
 - Part-time students
 - Students with disabilities or undergoing specific challenges.
 - Students who are already employed (some in areas other than the master's degree) and retain their job after graduation.
 - Mature students aiming at studying for other purposes than professional (for example, to complete their education, curiosity, self-fulfilment, etc.)
6. The institution uses a range of appropriate assessment methods to evaluate the learning experience gained by students (theoretical, practical, knowledge, skills, transversal competences, etc.), the curriculum, the teaching methodology.
7. The institution preserves and guarantees the quality of distance learning (delivery, evaluation).

How to understand the Quality standard and the criteria?

The institution must demonstrate how the programme targets the right level. Students and employers should not be misled on the level acquired.

Academics should be recruited and trained to deliver the appropriate teaching and support to student success.

127. S3.3_The institution ensures its capacity to run the programmes efficiently regarding its human resources and learning environment.

Criteria:

1. Training is planned efficiently and clearly, with program content and activities communicated well in advance.
2. Teaching activities are carried out in an efficient manner, in a suitable context (e.g. size of groups, infrastructures with adequate learning time).
3. Qualifications of teaching personnel correspond to the level and requirements of the study programme academic qualification procedures.
4. Teaching methods are evaluated and adjusted on a regular basis. The institution has and applies internal evaluation methods. The institution analyses the resources for the new study programs (classrooms, laboratories, computers, financial resources, learning material, staff quality, etc.)
5. The institution has set up a teacher evaluation system that values the quality of pedagogy and promotes emulation.
6. The institution guarantees the provision of adequate and easily accessible learning resources. Adequate support from the teacher is also provided to the student.
7. The institution ensures that it provides students with systematic, substantial and sequential opportunities to acquire important skills and knowledge. It is actively engaged in improving the skills of students, based on field studies, surveys of all stakeholders.

How to understand the Quality standard and the criteria?

The institution makes sure the number of teaching staff and their qualification corresponds to the needs of the programmes, not only academically, but also on other dimensions like student counselling, support to success. There is a Human resources policy that is known by all teaching staff.

The institution has a policy, funding and mechanisms to provide professional development of staff.

Teaching and learning to students today should be considered widely, including the acquisition of non-academic knowledge (e.g. social attitudes) and entrepreneurial spirit. Institutions may want to include values and principles such as integrity, respect for others, gender-positive attitude, climate change-protective learning environment, anti-radicalism...

128. S3.4_Clear goals are defined for each study programme and are communicated to students and stakeholders.**Criteria:**

1. The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's), as well as its orientation (professional or academic).
2. The institution ensures that the module content is congruent with study level (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral degrees) and expected learning outcomes. The institution stipulates the learning goals and requirements for each programme and makes them available to students.
3. The intended learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of the curriculum.
4. ECTS is used and credit points correspond to the intended learning outcomes and workload of students.
5. The intended learning outcomes tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations.
6. The intended learning outcomes are periodically evaluated.

7. The curriculum enables the students to master appropriate (professional or academic) research and professional skills.
8. The feasibility of the study programme is guaranteed, as is an appropriate amount of student workload.
9. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centered approach). The design of the learning environment chimes with the educational philosophy of the institution.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

The students must be clear on what she/he can get out of the study programmes. Employers should understand how the programmes match with their needs.

Academic staff should make sure the student-centred approach is a reality in the programmes/courses taught, in the design, the pedagogy and the evaluation of the students.

The European ECTS User's Guide provides relevant and concrete examples on how to improve with this quality standard.

Box 3 - Evidence for the quality standard on the curriculum

- Descriptions of assessment processes for curriculum;
- Examples of self-assessment and external assessment reports;
- Description of framework conditions and measures adopted in order to improve the quality of curriculum and examples of improvements made following assessments;
- Rules on the validation of the learning outcomes and the awarding of degrees in relation to the NQF and examples of degrees awarded;
- Activity reports at different levels of the institution on programme implementation and changes;
- Accreditation reports by ARACIS or other QA body;
- Description of processes that guarantee the connection of teaching with research and with changes in society and professional fields;
- Documents relating to the financial commitment of the competent local authority;
- Financial audit reports;
- Rules for the preparation of budgets and the use of funds;
- Documents guaranteeing the long-term use of infrastructure;
- Statistics concerning personnel and student supervision rates;
- Examples of contracts;
- Programme description (website, flyers) to students;
- Examples of diploma supplements;
- Regulations for promotion and continuing education and training;
- Description of organisations and measures that offer counselling and support;
- Examples of detailed job descriptions;
- Regulations with regard to scientific conferences;
- Description of personnel categories;
- Special projects to support junior staff.

D4. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

129. **S4.1_The programme design, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and review processes are in alignment with legislation and the institution's vision and strategy.**

Criteria:

1. Professionalism and sufficient human resources are guaranteed in the study program and ensure its successful implementation.
2. Recruitment and appointment of teaching staff is appropriate. Interdisciplinary links to other programmes is taken into consideration.

3. Qualitative and quantitative sufficiency of the equipment and spaces necessary for the successful implementation of the programme are guaranteed.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

The institution demonstrates the programmes are monitored and adapted to the situation met by the students. Programmes are sometimes designed and operated by academic staff, disconnected from the institution's mission and strategy.

This quality standard ensures that the programmes are fully harnessed in the institutional strategy and fulfils the national regulations.

130. **S4.2_The institution has and uses mechanisms to ensure that outcomes (of learning, employment and the satisfaction of the different interest groups) can be measured, analysed and used for the enhancement of the quality of programmes.**

Criteria:

1. The institution has a quality assurance procedure and ensures the quality of the teaching and learning process, whatever the way or the place where it is offered. Continuing education, virtual, distance learning or shift scheduling are clearly integrated and incorporated into the training policy and the institution's evaluation system.
2. The institution has developed specific quality assurance arrangements for distance learning:
 - Teaching capacities in relation to the content and distant delivery mode;
 - Teaching capacities in creating inter-activity amongst students and academics,
 - Organisational requirements for seamless implementation,
 - Face-to-face sessions to provide general orientation and introduction to the course materials at the start of the course; for difficult aspects of the course; for some revision work to learners.
 - Quality-ensured examination system.
3. The institution periodically monitors and evaluates the implementation of its study programs to ensure that they meet their assigned goals and that they meet the needs of students and society.
4. The institution has indicators to evaluate students on an on-going basis and evaluates learning outcomes effectively. The results achieved are continuously monitored and documented.
5. The institution encourages and uses student feedback. Students are involved in evaluation of lecturers and study programme implementation. Survey mechanisms can measure quality systematically to maintain dashboards.
6. Study programmes quality is evaluated also by statistics of employment of graduates in the relevant study programme.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

Complementary to the above quality standard, these standards make sure the institution has the capacity to deliver the programme at the highest quality level and monitors its implementation. Risks are anticipated, deviations and outdates are addressed properly, so that the learning outcomes and the ultimate utility of the programme is secured.

Teaching staff, students and externals have a say in the monitoring and the adaptation of the programmes.

Specific quality requirements are now expected for distance learning courses.

131. **S4.3_The institution has mechanisms to ensure that the hiring, management and professional development of its teaching staff is carried out with the necessary guarantees to ensure they can fulfil their corresponding functions.**

Criteria:

1. The institution makes its organization chart public.

2. The institution has a robust, fair, and transparent mechanism for recruiting its personnel.
3. The duties and responsibilities of the personnel correspond to their qualifications and experience.
4. The personnel is aware of their tasks and contribute to enhancing the institution's strategy and activities.
5. The number of personnel employed is adequate for developing all the institution's current and planned activities.
6. The institution follows a training plan according to priorities defined in development project.
7. The institution organizes social activities and promotes social dialogue.
8. The institution pursues a policy of life and health insurance.
9. The institution engages in implementation of integration policies for its staff.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

There are corresponding regulations in force for recruiting teaching and administrative personnel, which are clear and transparent and promote equality and recognition based on qualification and experience.

The institution provides for criteria and procedures for personnel recruitment in the internal regulations. The institution publishes employment criteria for each vacant job position. The institution recruits with priority qualified academic staff from internationally recognized universities. The institution pursues a policy of part-time employment for its needs. The institution pursues a policy of promotion of full-time, part-time, invited or contracted academic staff.

The institution might engage its staff to organise an information day, by preparing informational brochures. The institution pursues a favourable policy for integration of its staff in its social life.

132. **S4.4_The institution ensures the quality of exchange programs and international mobility (students, teachers, staff) and promotes mobility at all levels. Specific quality assurance mechanisms are in place for mobility.**

Criteria:

1. The study program has a modular structure linked to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), as well as a course-related examination system. Descriptions of the modules are available to students and contain all information particularly regarding learning content and outcomes, didactic methods, workload and prerequisites for credit allocation.
2. The combination and succession of programme modules are consistent with the programme's qualification objectives.
3. Mobility gaps (exchanges), if offered in the programme, are integrated into the curricula. The scope and form of program-related cooperation agreements are recorded, including those with national and international entities, higher education institutions, companies and other organizations.
4. Credits awarded in a foreign Higher Education Institution in the framework of a mutual agreement are transferred without review.
5. The institution promotes exchange programmes and international mobility among its students and teaching personnel as well as non-academic staff.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

The institution demonstrates here how its programmes are designed to facilitate student mobility, both outgoing and incoming. Mobility might be enlarged to academic staff and non-academic staff.

The institution makes sure credits awarded at home or abroad are accumulated and transferred, through equivalence of parts or complete study programmes in terms of the right to continue education in the same or similar study programme in a counterpart institution.

The European ECTS User's Guide provides relevant and concrete examples on how to improve with this quality standard.

133. **S4.5_The institution complies with quality criteria specific to joint programmes.** The declaration includes a range of quality standards that are already stipulated in the Romanian Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation. Below are listed the criteria specific to the Joint programme, applicable to Romanian higher education institutions.

Criteria:

1. Recognition of qualification and of periods of studies (including RPL) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents.
2. The institutions ensure that a joint bachelor programme would typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits. A joint Master programme would typically amount to 90-120 ECTS. The institution monitors the workload and the average time to complete the programme.
3. The institutions agree with foreign institutions on the terms and conditions of the joint programme, via a cooperation agreement covering the following issues:
 - a. Denomination of the degrees awarded in the programme;
 - b. Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding the management and financial organisation (including funding, sharing costs and income, etc.)
 - c. Admission and selection procedures for students;
 - d. Mobility of students and teachers (organisation before, during and after the mobility);
 - e. Examination regulation, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedure in the consortium.
4. The institution makes sure the degree belongs to the higher education degree system of the countries in which they are based.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

The joint programmes are not the amalgamation of teaching units, coming from various programmes and institutions. It is a consistent programme, offered jointly by the institutions which partner within a consortium sharing the same goals and rules.

Applying the criteria above ensures that the Romanian institution engaged in a joint programme plays its quality assurance part within the consortium.

134. **S4.6_The institution offers opportunities for any student's educational and professional needs to pursue, stop and resume the study programmes.**

Criteria:

1. Programmes allow a progressive transition from the first to the second cycle.
2. Programmes ensure successful completion of first cycle and admission to second cycle.
3. Programmes of first-cycle studies provide students with basic knowledge, general scientific methods and principles and specific moulding skills.
4. The institution guides students wishing to change study programmes and documents the process.
5. There are appropriate mechanisms to ensure pathways, recognition of prior learning.
6. Students are informed and guided about the possibility of transfer of study programmes or credits received during their studies.
7. Credits awarded in any higher education institution in the framework of a mutual agreement are transferred without review. The institution provides opportunities to transfer credits awarded at home or abroad, through equivalence of parts or complete study programmes in terms of the right to continue education in the same or similar study programme in a counterpart institution.

8. Programmes with special profiles (e.g. dual, part-time, occupational, distance learning) take appropriate measures (e.g. access to an online distance learning platform) to offer their students a reasonable and proportional education.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

The students are allowed to make choices, change orientation, discover new learning opportunities, and value previous experience. There is no longer a monolithic learning trajectory.

To allow such flexibility, the institution must set appropriate mechanisms, inform students, teaching staff and administrative staff of their existence, and assess their effectiveness.

135. **S4.7_The institution has a clear policy regarding the assessment of student's achievements (academic and work placement and other learning outcomes a gained through the study programmes) as well as the accumulation and transfer of credits, so that the assessment is fair, equitable, understood by the students and in line with the pedagogical approach of the institution.**

Criteria:

1. The assessment is consistent, applied fairly to all students and carried out in accordance with established and communicated procedures.
2. The institution demonstrates that students who successfully complete a training program have acquired the knowledge and developed the skills that are identified as objectives of the program. The assessment method allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.
3. Students benefit from feedback, if necessary with advice on the learning process.
4. Students have the right of appeal in the event of a problem; the protest and resolution procedure are clearly explained.
5. Evaluation methods are evaluated regularly for adequacy and effectiveness.
6. Students receive a diploma supplement (a document which describes the knowledge and skills acquired by holders of higher education diplomas) explaining the qualification obtained, including the learning outcomes achieved as well as the context, level, the content and status of the studies successfully completed and completed.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

The evaluation criteria and methods, and the rating criteria are regulated and published in advance. The frequency and organization of examinations are appropriate and proportionate.

Students have access to personal exam scores, by observing the confidentiality principle.

A committee set up in compliance with examination regulations reviews complaints against examination scores.

136. **S4.8_The institution brings to the forefront and supports projects of pedagogical innovation and excellence in order to improve the integration of graduates and to strengthen the capacity for innovation by setting up innovative and employable courses.**

Criteria:

1. The institution evaluates achievements of its staff using clear, transparent criteria.
2. The institution encourages training and promotion of academic staff.
3. The institution engages foreign professors in committees/panels that promote internal academic staff.
4. The institution has a support structure that promotes continuous teaching improvement. Academic staff are trained continuously to improve teaching.
5. The institution also provides additional educational programs to cover the continuous training of its personnel and the enhancement of student training.

6. The institution has supporting mechanisms for experimentation in teaching.
7. Academic staff, teaching, scientific supporting staff and administrative staff are committed to improve teaching and application of study programmes.

How to understand the quality standard and criteria?

This quality standard relates to all measures and incentives taken by the institution to trigger innovation of teaching and learning and reward staff who show engagement.

These standards focus more on the quality of the teaching and staff support for student achievements than on the individual performance review of the teachers, which each institution designs in accordance with legislation.

Box 4 - Evidence for the quality standard on Teaching, learning and assessment

- Description of monitoring tools and processes of programme;
- Description of policy on the evaluation of students, mechanisms, regulations;
- Description of appeal mechanisms (e.g. ombudsman) in case of conflicts on evaluations for students or promotions for staff;
- Description of learning outcomes and transversal skills in programme presentations;
- Recruitment process for staff and letters of appointments, contracts;
- Description of mechanisms that allow students to play an active part in the creation of learning processes;
- Description of pathways, RPL and other mechanisms ensuring continuation of studies and re-orientation possibilities;
- Calculation of credits (ECTS);
- Strategy for the internationalisation of the institution;
- Rules on mobility and measures to promote it (e.g. support services, funding);
- Measures and instruments for the recognition of titles and certifications;
- Admissions regulations and other institutional founding documents;
- Examination regulations;
- Description of mechanisms introduced in order to provide information about admission and assessment methods;
- Regulations on the awarding of degrees.

D5. Research support

137. **S5.1_The institution ensures that the research projects contribute to and guarantee a high level of scientific quality in a relevant research area.**

Criteria:

1. The institution ensures that there is a shared understanding of the nature, role and goals of research.
2. There are standards, procedures and processes for the approval of research proposals, and theses, and the conduct and supervision of research studies.
3. There are policies, research management systems and strategies, adequate infrastructure and resources that facilitate all staff to undertake innovative research, and publish research results;
4. There is effective monitoring and evaluation of the research system.
5. The institution ensures the respect of research ethics.

138. **S5.2_The institution ensures the dynamism of national and international development of its research policy as well as the valorisation and dissemination of its results.**

Criteria:

1. The institution supports and rewards participation in international research and education programs of teams or individuals.
2. The institution has the ability to identify and mobilize key institutional, scientific and socio-economic interlocutors and key valuation structures
3. The institution knows its human potential, its material and financial resources as well as the opportunities offered by its regional, national and international environment for scientific research.
4. The institution has a monitoring and prospecting structure on scientific and technological developments in its regional, national and international environment.
5. The institution has a relevant, effective and comprehensive strategy for scientific cooperation, aligned with its internationalisation strategy.

139. S5.3_There is an institutional strategy and programming of research activities.

Criteria:

1. Research activity is in compliance with the mission and strategy of Institution and with the developments and important issues in the international level.
2. The vision and strategy of the research are elaborated in consultation with the actors of the institution.
3. The priorities of the research correspond to the objectives of positioning the institution.
4. The institution organizes strategic reflection workshops on its scientific research and innovation policy, using specific external expertise.

140. S5.4_The institution promotes research and scientific activity in programmes teaching where relevant.

Criteria:

1. The institution ensures the development of research teams/groups, research laboratories, organisation of workshops, involvement of the students in research activities; participation of staff and students (MSc / MBA / MA) in scientific conferences.
2. The institution ensures the mutual integration of science and education.
3. The institution ensures that the research work or research findings are integrated into the learning process.
4. The actors of the field of research are involved in the training (diploma editing, educational and administrative responsibilities (master, ED, training networks, etc.).
5. The training fields are backed by the research field (contents of the model, teaching interventions).
6. The institution ensures treatment of interdisciplinary in the articulation of the field of research and the field (s) of formation.
7. The institution has a policy of welcoming and supervising students and doctoral students within the research units.
8. The institution ensures the smooth running of doctoral studies and ensures favourable conditions for the development of research work.

141. S5.5_The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivise, assess and reward research engagement.

Criteria:

1. The institution establishes research structures based on criteria that take into account research priorities, scientific skills, human potential and infrastructure.

2. The institution encourages the evolution of research structures through a reflection on trends in the scientific environment, and promotes the grouping, the re-composition of existing entities or the emergence of new relevant structures.
3. The institution monitors and evaluates the institutional (or faculty or departmental) research policy and strategy.
4. The institution has provisions and arrangements for steering, monitoring and regulating its research entities and research programs and initiatives supported.
5. The institution supports the use of peer self-assessment on a regular basis (e.g. before the renewal of their accreditation).
6. The scientific equipment is shared between the various research entities of the institution.
7. The institution supports and rewards research performance, productivity and values scientific impact.

142. S5.6_The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to foster the production and valorisation of research.

Criteria:

1. The institution uses the external evaluation of its system and research entities to identify its research potential and promote excellence in this area.
2. The institution organises the evaluation of doctoral studies on a regular basis. The results of this evaluation are the basis of the improvements made.
3. The institution encourages innovation and the emergence of innovative teams and programs.
4. The institution has an internal and external communication strategy that is relevant and adapted to the different target audiences in the field of research.
5. The institution has a policy of promoting and transferring results of research.

How to understand the quality standards and criteria for the research?

The quality standard aims here to show how the institution triggers research, supports academics, and creates an enabling environment for research. Often, individuals or teams within laboratories conduct research activities, quite independently, preventing an ambitious scientific policy and international visibility.

An institutional research policy would help the consistency of the research, for the benefit of the image, reputation of the institution as a whole – allowing the whole community and students to reap the benefits of a research-engaged institution. This standard is furthermore a strong relation with the internationalisation, strategy, as research is intrinsically a cross-border activity.

The quality standards on research are valid for any institution, including those with underdeveloped research activities or for which research is not an issue. Typically, a vocational programme does not need to be enriched with research or taught by top-notch researchers, neither they need scientific equipment. However, the international trend faced in higher education as per research, show the benefits of connecting teaching to applied research or grey research.

Students might be invited to be involved in project-based activity with a company, that will not result in a scientific article. Students might be engaged in entrepreneurship and start a business resulting in a patent, where researchers and scientific equipment played a role. Research should thus be considered in its wider sense.

Box 5 - Evidence for the quality standard on Research support

- Founding legislation of the HE institution and research;
- Strategic documents on science and research objectives;
- Reports intended for those responsible (management and business reports, financial audits, etc.);
- Description of mechanisms that guarantee that the activities of the HE institution comply with its mission, its specific characteristics and its strategic objectives (e.g. preparation and approval of study plans, focus of research and priorities with regard to service provision);
- Description of mechanisms that guarantee that account is taken of competitors when preparing new projects;
- Description of mechanisms that allow research to be conducted in accordance with the best international practices;
- Distribution of funds according to activities;
- Description of mechanisms that allow the freedom and independence of research to be guaranteed (e.g. regulations connected to third-party funds, to secondary services of academic staff, research contracts, sponsorship contracts, procedures and guidelines for the selection and appointment of staff, description of terms and conditions laid down for reporting abuse).

D6. Students and their Support

143. S6.1_Admission requirements and student evaluation methods are clear, manageable and publicly made available.

Criteria:

1. The institution informs students of training programs, access conditions and evaluation methods. The institution publishes the objectives of each course and the admission procedures (diplomas required, pedagogical prerequisites, selection procedures), as well as the skills to be acquired.
2. The institution applies in a consistent and consistent manner predefined and published rules covering all phases of the study cycle, from the admission and progression of students, to the recognition and certification of their prior learning.
3. The institution informs future students for study programmes that it provides through the career counselling office.
4. Admission requirements and student selection procedures correspond to the standards of the study program. They are realistic with a view to the intended learning outcomes, and the curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students.
5. Information specifically for students with disabilities concerning the study program, education process, admission requirements, and aforementioned compensative measures are documented and published.
6. The institution welcomes and pursues specific policies for absorption and integration of new students.

144. S6.2_Mechanisms for student support and advice are established for successful accomplishment, career preparation and continuation of studies.

Criteria:

1. The institution fosters the students' contribution to quality improvement of teaching and learning via the consultation individuals or associations.
2. The institution fosters communication with alumni and the creation of an alumni community.
3. The institution engages in information and orientation of students.
4. The institution has established mechanisms relating to student support and advice. Structure for guiding and advising students supports them in all cycles of study the institution provides.

5. The institution has a structure of information and counselling for students.
6. The institution follows supporting policies for students' progress.
7. The institution applies alternative teaching methods depending on its students' interests.
8. The institution assists and guides students how to find literature.
9. The institution offers courses at its premises to help students in difficulty.
10. The institution provides orientation activities.

145. **S6.3_The institution ensures inclusiveness of any kind of student admitted.**

Criteria:

1. Learning and teaching take into account the diversity of students and their needs, offering flexible learning paths in an inclusive education context.
2. Institution takes care of students who are not adequately prepared for study at the level for which they have been admitted in order to support them to attain appropriate educational goals;
3. The institution supports the use of teaching methods to ensure quality training regardless of student profile.
4. The institution supports research and the implementation of new learning methods to foster interdisciplinary and flexible modes of learning for students to develop transversal skills.
5. The institution has transparently implemented provisions for the promotion of gender equality and equal opportunity for students with particular living circumstances and other vulnerable groups.
6. The institution pursues a policy of support for students with disabilities and chronic illnesses.
7. The institution pursues a policy of support for Roma students and Balkan Egyptians.
8. The institution pursues a policy of support for students engaging in sports activities at high levels.
9. The institution pursues a policy of support for students wishing to pursue part-time studies.

146. **S6.4_Institution has a supportive policy to extra-curriculum activities and rewards the engagement of students.**

Criteria:

1. For the benefit of the students, institution, and society, the institution incorporates community engagement in its activities, with the objective of:
2. Enriching scholarship, research, and creative activities;
 - a. Enhancing teaching and learning;
 - b. Facilitating preparation of educated and engaged citizens;
 - c. Strengthening democratic values and civic responsibility in students;
 - d. Addressing critical societal issues and contribute to public good.
3. The institution pursues a policy to facilitate student life.
4. The institution supports students' cultural life.
5. The institution is actively and regularly involved in regional socio-cultural initiatives.
6. The institution supports students who engage in sports activities organised by its structures and other institutions.

How to understand the quality standards and criteria?

The Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation values the inclusion of any student in Romanian higher education. The institutions should therefore comply with standards on the policies and mechanisms in place to support student success and offer equal opportunities for

those who can perform, as well as those facing difficulties. For instance, students with disabilities benefit from compensative measures regarding time limits and formal requirements of the study process, as well as all performance records in the course of study. Information specifically for students with disabilities concerning the study program, education process, admission requirements, and aforementioned compensative measures are documented and published.

The institution has a responsibility in informing clearly the students on the objectives of their studies, the possibilities to navigate amongst the programmes, pursue studies, enrol the job market, and participate in extra curriculum activities.

Supporting the human development and civic consciousness of students has become a key priority for many higher education institutions around Europe and the world.

Box 6 - Evidence for the quality standard on Student support

- Description of mechanisms allowing the suitability of organisations and student support measures to be guaranteed;
- Legislation and regulations guaranteeing non-discrimination;
- Description of mechanisms promoting the institutional embedding of equality policies;
- Policy or strategy, measures adopted and equal opportunities projects;
- Programmes of extra-curriculum activities;
- Regulations on ECTS recognised for engagement in extra-curriculum activities
- Documents presenting the services in charge of supporting students (e.g. tutorship) and counselling students (e.g. career office).

2.2. Sources and information

- European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education AREA, 2015, European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education AREA, 2015 https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf
- ECTS Users' Guide, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/docs/ects-users-guide_en.pdf
- OECD-UNESCO Guidelines for cross-boarder education, 2004, OECD-UNESCO Guidelines for cross-boarder education, 2004. <http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/35779480.pdf>
- European Approach of quality assurance for Joint programme, 2015, https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf
- Certificate for internationalisation of higher education, ECA. "Internationalisation Platform – Certification." <http://ecahe.eu/home/internationalisation-platform/certification/>

Chapter 3 - Overarching Methodology for Institutional Evaluation

3.1. The evaluation process at a glance

The legal procedure

147. According to Romanian **Law no. 87/2006**, accreditation is a legal procedure which includes two key steps: provisional authorization and accreditation. If an education provider intends to establish a new HEI or study program, corresponding to a specific qualification, the education provider needs to undertake a process of external evaluation. This process allows for provisional authorization, and then for accreditation, after successfully operating the study program for a number of years. For example, for accreditation of study programs at the bachelor degree level, the interval between the graduation of the first cohort of students and the application for accreditation of the study program should not exceed two years; while accreditation of HEIs can be undertaken after the accreditation of three study programs.

148. **External evaluation for accreditation of study programs.** Program accreditation aims to certify compliance of a study program with pre-determined minimum performance indicators. The evaluation is based on the HEI's self-evaluation report and site-visit results. The experts panel presents the site-visit results to the permanent specialty commission²⁴ for the respective study domain. The role of the commission is particularly important in ensuring compliance with the regulations and consistency of decisions. The report is submitted to the Accreditation Department for validation of procedures, and then to the ARACIS Council. The Council verifies the report and procedures and takes the final decision on accreditation of study program. The final decision is a "yes/no" type, either granting or not granting the right to function of a study program. The final decision is sent to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) to prepare the Government Decision on accreditation of study program.

149. **External evaluation for accreditation of HEIs (as an institution).** Institutional accreditation aims to certify compliance of an HEI with pre-determined minimum performance indicators. The evaluation is based on the HEI's self-evaluation report and site-visit results. Additional experts might be consulted for specific study programs or fields. An HEI is informed by a comprehensive letter about the main conclusions and recommendations and is given the possibility to react. The report is drafted by the expert panel's director, and the HEI's approval is published on ARACIS website. The review's conclusion is either "accreditation proposal" or "non-accreditation proposal", referring to an HEI's credibility to assure quality of study programs and management activities. The HEI has the possibility to appeal ARACIS' decision. The final decision is shared with the MoNE.

150. **Periodic external evaluations (periodic reviews) of accredited study programs and HEIs.** Both accredited study programs and HEIs are subject to periodic external evaluation of institutional quality assurance mechanisms and compliance with the ESG every five years.

151. **External evaluation of accredited study programmes.** It applies to bachelor and master levels of education. The evaluation is based on the HEI's self-evaluation report and site-visit results. The panel of experts presents the site-visit results to the permanent specialty commission for the respective study domain. The report is submitted to the Accreditation Department for validation of procedures, and then to the ARACIS Council. The Council verifies the report and procedures and takes the final decision. The final decision is sent to the MoNE.

152. There is an appeal procedure in place, which HEIs may use if their representatives are dissatisfied with the procedures or the decision. A new expert panel may be appointed to examine the appeal letter and perform additional evaluation, if needed. The final decision is validated by the ARACIS Council.

153. The result of the study program evaluations refers to the following three levels of confidence:

- i. confidence;

²⁴ There are 15 permanent specialty commissions for the following domains: exact and natural sciences; humanities and theology; law; social, political and communication sciences; administrative, education and psychology sciences; economic sciences (two commissions); arts, architecture, urban planning and sports; agriculture, forestry and veterinary medicine; engineering sciences (two commissions); medical sciences; distance learning and part-time programs; institutional evaluation for management and financial activities; and the employers registry.

- ii. limited confidence; and
- iii. no confidence.

154. **External evaluation of accredited HEIs:** the experts panel consists of institutional evaluators, including a student representative and an international expert, as well as study program evaluators for at least 20% of HEI's accredited study programs. HEI is informed by a comprehensive letter about the findings and preliminary conclusions and is given the possibility to react. The report is sent to the Department of external quality assurance evaluation for validation of procedures and drafting its own report. All the reports are presented to the ARACIS Council for their final decision. The final report, the decision, and the follow-up procedures are published on the ARACIS website. The decision is shared with the HEI and the MoNE.

155. The result of the HEI evaluations refers to the following four levels of confidence:

- i. high degree of confidence,
- ii. confidence,
- iii. limited degree of confidence, and
- iv. lack of confidence.

3.2. The 4-step Evaluation

156. The evaluation process has 4 steps:

STEP 1. *A self-evaluation report:* The self-evaluation report comprises an analytical component which identifies the strengths and weaknesses, successes, threats, uncertainties of quality assurance, and future improvement measures. The report also includes supporting documents and data to provide evidence for the report's assertions. The self-evaluation report uses as compulsory references mentioned in this Methodology, so that its main chapters reflect the 6 domains. The present Framework for institutional evaluation includes **a specific guide for Internal Quality Assurance (to be developed)**.

STEP 2. *An external evaluation:* the evaluation is conducted by a panel of independent experts (the Experts Committee) selected from ARACIS' register of external evaluators. Site-visits are mandatory and help evaluators to assess compliance with the criteria and quality standards. The Experts Committee is made-up of three-four evaluators, which also includes one or more students, for a duration of three-four days, so as to concretely assess the correspondence between the data, information and conclusions of the self-assessment, on the one hand, and the actual institutional reality, on the other hand; the findings of the visit are noted in an external evaluation report which is concretized in conclusions and recommendations. The present Framework for institutional evaluation includes **the Experts Handbook (to be further developed)**.

STEP 3. *Scoring the level of fulfilment of quality standards (to be further developed).* In order to assess the level of fulfilment of quality standards, the Methodology includes a scoring grid, meant to assess the minimum thresholds and identify the rooms for progress of the institution.

STEP 4. *Preparation and publication of the report, including follow-up procedure.* The report includes decisions, conclusions, and recommendations. For example, in the case of temporary authorization and accreditation, the main decision is whether to grant the status. If the recommendations advise for a supplemental implementation period, an implementation plan should be prepared, which should include specific provisions and deadlines. In evaluations where the highest degree of confidence is awarded to a study program or HEI, the follow-up procedure requires a brief site-visit after three years.

157. The quality standards for institutional evaluation are presented in the following table:

Table 5 - Synthesis of areas, standards and criteria for quality assurance and accreditation

Quality Standards	Criteria
Strategy and Governance	
<p>1. The institution's vision and strategic plan are in alignment with its mission. The institution has adequate policies, processes, procedures and instruments to realize its mission and implement its strategic plans.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution has set and published a mission statement. 2. The institution's strategies and policies comply with the mission statement. 3. The strategy of the Institution is implementable and in consistency with the national development priorities. 4. The institution ensures the consistency of institutional and faculty/department strategies with a view to preventing conflicts. 5. The institution assures equal opportunities for development and improvement between different units (faculty, departments, programmes) 6. The institution has and ensures the establishment of mechanisms that ensure the implementation of the charter of values and its proper functioning. 7. The institution has an action plan, based on priorities and broken down into monitoring indicators. 8. Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensible, integrated and appropriate to the institution. 9. The institution has installed structures of supervision and internal evaluation. 10. The institution periodically monitors and evaluates its missions, objectives and achievements by assessing their relevance to the evolution of the institution and its external environment. 11. The institution has a system of periodic review of its action plan, taking into account the results of the evaluations. 12. Academic freedom, diversity, research and teaching, as well as corporate responsibility, are encouraged and help to accomplish the institution's mission and purpose.
<p>2. Personnel and students and other stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the institution's strategy.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic staff are involved in internal debate under institutional procedures prescribed by statute. 2. The governance system takes into consideration the views and comments of students, as stakeholders, in the areas in which students have a direct and reasonable interest (training, student affairs). 3. All personnel – teaching and non-teaching – are actively involved in the institution's -strategy (design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation). They are aware and work towards achieving the goals established by the institution. 4. External stakeholders (employers, experts, authorities...) are consulted and engaged in the design of the institutional strategy or part thereof (e.g. internationalization strategy).
<p>3. The institution contributes to the social, economic and cultural development of the territory on which it is located and at the national level.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution is well represented or actively involved in professional associations and associations or platforms for teaching and research. 2. The institution is actively and regularly involved in local or regional socio-cultural initiatives. 3. Staff participate in collaborative initiatives developed with external partners. 4. The institution develops, participates in and manages service projects for the development or social assistance community. 5. Service, development or social service projects are actively used in teaching and provide impulses and ideas for research. 6. Students engage in projects with societal or regional impact.

Quality Standards	Criteria
<p>4. There is a clear and transparent division of responsibilities, duties and authorities among the personal (academic and non-academic staff), according to the expected qualifications.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution has the decision-making structures and bodies at all levels, which have their specific organisation and their powers and competencies. 2. Academic staff, administrative staff, students, etc. have opportunities to participate in management and decision-making processes, related to planning, resource allocation, program and curricular development. 3. There is coordination among faculties and departments within the institution. 4. The management system includes mechanisms of planning, development and continuous improvement, risk assessment, activity assessment of units and their interaction. 5. The institution has a clear allocation of staff duties, delimitation of responsibilities of collegial bodies. Inst has established a transparent system of information and communication (internet, portals, emails etc.) with students, staff and stakeholders.
<p>5. Students are involved in the administrative and decision-making processes and are incentivized to engage in the institution's strategy and management.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students are represented in governing bodies of the institution, structures of teaching-research and services. 2. Student Councils express opinions and proposals for all problems of general interest of the institution as educational plans and research programmes, study regulations, etc. 3. The institution supports student councils and finances their activities.
<p>6. Institution pursues an open strategy of collaboration and partnership at a regional, national and international level.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institution determines its cooperation policy priorities with the relevant stakeholders, either local, national or international. The stakeholders might be higher education institutions, companies, public authorities, civil social organisations. 2. Cooperation strategy is reflected in long-term strategy of institution development as well as the regional, national and international development strategies. 3. Institution takes into account the needs of regional economy and labour market for opening new programmes or drafting scientific research projects. 4. Institution collaborates with regional partners in the framework of cooperation strategy implementation. 5. Institution collaborates with other institutions to provide services to students that help them succeed in their studies, professional and personal development. 6. The Institution has defined objectives in teaching, learning, research, internationalisation, governance and relationship to the society that fit into the national and regional context. 7. The institution has a strategy with regard to the development of society that fits into the institutional profile. Conversely, the institution's profile in teaching, learning, research, services fit into the regional, national and international context.
<p>Quality assurance system</p>	
<p>7. A quality management system is developed with clearly defined objectives, policies and procedures in order to promote a quality assurance culture and ensuring quality of the institution's activities (teaching, research, services to the society).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The quality assurance policy covers all elements of the institution's activities. 2. The quality assurance policy is institutionalised and operationalized into structures and clearly defined into appropriate, effective and efficient mechanisms and methods). 3. The internal quality assurance system is enforced at all levels across the institution. 4. The institution defines quality standards for its central processes and for the products or objectives it uses or implements, notably in teaching, research, internationalisation, cooperation and services to the society. 5. The appropriate stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the quality assurance policy 6. The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its planning and evaluation activities on an ongoing basis, in order to further enhance the implementation of the quality assurance policy.

Quality Standards	Criteria
	<p>7. The information gathered by or from students, alumni, employers and other stakeholders are used for quality improvement.</p> <p>8. The institution puts in place clear, controlled and shared procedures for key processes.</p> <p>9. Corrective actions are systematically implemented when dysfunctions or non-conformities are detected as a result of assessments or complaints.</p> <p>10. The institution uses data and analysis to document its decision.</p>
<p>8. The institution designs and implement policies with the objective of preserving and improving quality, especially for human resources, learning environment (infrastructures, equipment) and financial resources.</p>	<p>1. The institution ensures, through needs analysis and managerial arrangements, the necessary financial resources in the short and long term.</p> <p>2. The institution –or part thereof (faculty, departments) conducts evaluations of governance and management, policies for teaching, research, internationalisation, cooperation and for services to the society, among other domains, on a regular basis and takes subsequent decisions.</p> <p>3. For human resources management, the institution has defined, selected and made available human resources and appropriate tools.</p> <p>4. The institution provides and manages adequate premises for implementing the study programs and research activities, according to its mission and strategies.</p> <p>5. The institution provides students and staff with all the resources required for training and research work (access to documentation, syllabi...)</p> <p>6. The IT infrastructure is managed efficiently and is permanently maintained in a proper operating state.</p>
The Curriculum	
<p>9. The institution ensures that new and existing programmes reflect the needs of society and are continually adapted to societal development and the changing needs of the Romanian and regional, and international labour market as well as societal needs.</p>	<p>1. The institution has an overall strategy, and the study program's qualification objectives have been developed in accordance with it. The national legal requirements regarding the study program's establishment have been observed.</p> <p>2. Study programmes are drafted in such a way that students have opportunities for employment, professional and personal development, documented by a feasibility study or any means demonstrating the current and future needs of the job market and the society.</p> <p>3. The learning outcomes approach is being implemented incrementally at programme level.</p> <p>4. Study programmes reflect the needs of the labour market and stipulate the competences to be acquired by students.</p> <p>5. Study programmes aim to provide students with specialised and interdisciplinary knowledge, as well as professional, methodological and general competence.</p> <p>6. The institution collaborates with the socio-economic world to explore its needs and upgrades regularly the program contents.</p> <p>7. The institution accommodates the appropriate learning environment (physical and virtual) including premises and equipment.</p> <p>8. The institution has specific arrangements and process for the introduction of new programmes (design, validation, revision).</p> <p>9. The institution assesses regularly and through specific arrangements, the objectives, content, delivery modes and student assessment of the programmes and the impacts on the students learning. The institutions assess the changes of the market and job-training matching, provides evidence of student success and of programme effectiveness as well as staff experience.</p>

Quality Standards	Criteria
<p>10. The institution ensures that programmes have an appropriate level (short cycle/Ba/M/Doctorate, vocational, Life Long Learning), an academic content and an educational quality that supports students' learning and the achievement of programme objectives.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study programmes are offered in line with Bologna Process in successive cycles under the system: Bachelor, Master, Doctorate and ensures the continuity of content of study programs across the different levels (bachelor's, master's, doctorate degrees, additional education), based on academic interdependence of disciplines and transversality. 2. The curriculum is organised to help seamless student progress (e.g. modularisation, Recognition of Prior Learning). 3. Study programmes are designed to facilitate students' mobility and ensure transfer and recognition of credits. 4. The institution offers specific study programmes (e.g. short-term specialisations) as a form of lifelong learning. 5. Study programmes are organised to meet the needs of different categories of students such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part-time students • Students with disabilities or undergoing specific challenges. • Students who are already employed (some in areas other than the master's degree) and retain their job after graduation. • Mature students aiming at studying for purposes other than professional (for example, to complete their education, curiosity, self-fulfillment, etc). 6. The institution uses a range of appropriate assessment methods to evaluate the learning experience gained by students (theoretical, practical, knowledge, skills, transversal competences, etc.), the curriculum, the teaching methodology. 7. The institution preserves and guarantees the quality of distance learning (delivery, evaluation).
<p>11. The institution ensures its capacity to run the programmes efficiently regarding its human resources and learning environment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training is planned efficiently and clearly, with program content and activities communicated well in advance. 2. Teaching activities are carried out in an efficient manner, in a suitable context (e.g. size of groups, infrastructures with adequate learning time. 3. Qualifications of teaching personnel correspond to the level and requirements of the study programme academic qualification procedures. 4. Teaching methods are evaluated and adjusted on a regular basis. The institution has and applies internal evaluation methods. The institution analyses the resources for the new study programs (classrooms, laboratories, computers, financial resources, learning material, staff quality, etc.) 5. The institution has set up a teacher evaluation system that values the quality of pedagogy and promotes emulation. 6. The institution guarantees the provision of adequate and easily accessible learning resources. Adequate support from the teacher is also provided to the student. 7. The institution ensures that it provides students with systematic, substantial and sequential opportunities to acquire important skills and knowledge. It is actively engaged in improving the skills of students, based on field studies, surveys of all stakeholders.

Quality Standards	Criteria
12. Clear goals are defined for each study programme and are communicated to students and stakeholders.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The intended learning outcomes demonstrably describe the level of the programme (Associate Degree, Bachelor's, or Master's), as well as its orientation (professional or academic). 2. The institution ensures that the module content is congruent with study level (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral degrees) and expected learning outcomes. The institution stipulates the learning goals and requirements for each programme and makes them available to students. 3. The intended learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of the curriculum. 4. ECTS is used and credit points correspond to the intended learning outcomes and workload of students. 5. The intended learning outcomes tie in with the regional, national or international perspective of the requirements currently set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the programme. Insofar as is applicable, the intended learning outcomes are in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations. 6. The intended learning outcomes are periodically evaluated. 7. The curriculum enables the students to master appropriate (professional or academic) research and professional skills. 8. The feasibility of the study programme is guaranteed, as is an appropriate amount of student workload. 9. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centered approach). The design of the learning environment chimes with the educational philosophy of the institution.
Teaching, Learning and Assessment	
13. The programme design, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and review processes are in alignment with legislation and the institution's vision and strategy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professionalism and sufficient human resources are guaranteed in the study program and ensure its successful implementation. 2. Recruitment and appointment of teaching staff is appropriate. Interdisciplinary links to other programmes are taken into consideration. 3. Qualitative and quantitative sufficiency of the equipment and spaces necessary for the successful implementation of the programme are guaranteed.
14. The institution has and uses mechanisms to ensure that outcomes (of learning, employment and the satisfaction of the different interest groups) can be measured, analysed and used for the enhancement of the quality of programmes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution has a quality assurance procedure and ensures the quality of the teaching and learning process, whatever the way or the place where it is offered. Continuing education, virtual, distance learning or shift scheduling are clearly integrated and incorporated into the training policy and the institution's evaluation system. 2. The institution has developed specific quality assurance arrangements for distance learning: 3. The institution periodically monitors and evaluates the implementation of its study programs to ensure that they meet their assigned goals and that they meet the needs of students and society. 4. The institution has indicators to evaluate students on an ongoing basis and evaluates learning outcomes effectively. The results achieved are continuously monitored and documented. 5. The institution encourages and uses student feedback. Students are involved in evaluation of lecturers and study programme implementation. Survey mechanisms can measure quality systematically to maintain dashboards. 6. Study programmes quality is evaluated also by statistics of employment of graduates in the relevant study programme.

Quality Standards	Criteria
15. The institution has mechanisms to ensure that the hiring, management and professional development of its teaching staff is carried out with the necessary guarantees to ensure they can fulfil their corresponding functions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution makes its organization chart public. 2. The institution has a robust, fair, transparent mechanism for recruiting its personnel. 3. The duties and responsibilities of the personnel correspond to their qualifications and experience. 4. The personnel is aware of their tasks and contribute to enhancing the institution's strategy and activities. 5. The number of personnel employed is adequate for developing all the institution's current and planned activities. 6. The institution follows a training plan according to priorities defined in development project. 7. The institution organizes social activities and promotes social dialogue. 8. The institution pursues a policy of life and health insurance. 9. The institution engages in implementation of integration policies for its staff.
16. The institution ensures the quality of exchange programs and international mobility (students, teachers, staff) and promotes mobility at all levels. Specific quality assurance mechanisms are in place for mobility.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The study program has a modular structure linked to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), as well as a course-related examination system. Descriptions of the modules are available to students and contain all information particularly regarding learning content and outcomes, didactic methods, workload and prerequisites for credit allocation. 2. The combination and succession of programme modules are consistent with the programme's qualification objectives. 3. Mobility gaps (exchanges), if offered in the programme, are integrated into the curricula. The scope and form of program-related cooperation agreements are recorded, including those with national and international entities, higher education institutions, companies and other organizations. 4. Credits awarded in a foreign Higher Education Institution in the framework of a mutual agreement are transferred without review. 5. The institution promotes exchange programmes and international mobility among its students and teaching personnel as well as non-academic staff.
17. The institution complies with quality criteria specific to joint programmes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognition of qualification and of periods of studies (including RPL) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents. 2. The institutions ensures and a joint bachelor programme would typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits. A joint Master programme would typically amount to 90-120 ECTS. The institution monitors the workload and the average time to complete the programme. 3. The institutions agrees with foreign institutions on the terms and conditions of the joint programme, via a cooperation agreement 4. The institution makes sure the degree belongs to the higher education degree system of the countries in which they are based.

Quality Standards	Criteria
18. The institution offers opportunities for any student's educational and professional needs to pursue, stop and resume the study programmes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programmes allow a progressive transition from the first to the second cycle. 2. Programmes ensure successful completion of first cycle and admission to second cycle. 3. Programmes of first-cycle studies provide students with basic knowledge, general scientific methods and principles and specific molding skills. 4. The institution guides students wishing to change study programmes and documents the process. 5. There are appropriate mechanisms to ensure pathways, recognition of prior learning. 6. Students are informed and guided about the possibility of transfer of study programmes or credits received during their studies. 7. Credits awarded in any higher education institution in the framework of a mutual agreement are transferred without review. The institution provides opportunities to transfer credits awarded at home or abroad, through equivalence of parts or complete study programmes in terms of the right to continue education in the same or similar study programme in a counterpart institution. 8. Programmes with special profiles (e.g. dual, part-time, occupational, distance learning) take appropriate measures (e.g. access to an online distance learning platform) to offer their students a reasonable and proportional education.
19. The institution has a clear policy regarding the assessment of student's achievements (academic and work placement and other learning outcomes gained through the study programmes) as well as the accumulation and transfer of credits, so that the assessment is fair, equitable, understood by the students and in line with the pedagogical approach of the institution.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The assessment is consistent, applied fairly to all students and carried out in accordance with established and communicated procedures. 2. The institution demonstrates that students who successfully complete a training program have acquired the knowledge and developed the skills that are identified as objectives of the program. The assessment method allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. 3. Students benefit from feedback, if necessary with advice on the learning process. 4. Students have the right of appeal in the event of a problem; the protest and resolution procedure are clearly explained. 5. Evaluation methods are evaluated regularly for adequacy and effectiveness. 6. Students receive a diploma supplement (a document which describes the knowledge and skills acquired by holders of higher education diplomas) explaining the qualification obtained, including the learning outcomes achieved as well as the context, level, the content and status of the studies successfully completed and completed.
20. The institution brings to the forefront and supports projects of pedagogical innovation and excellence in order to improve the integration of graduates and to strengthen the capacity for innovation by setting up innovative and employable courses.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution evaluates achievements of its staff using clear, transparent criteria. 2. The institution encourages training and promotion of academic staff. 3. The institution engages foreign professors in committees/panels that promote internal academic staff. 4. The institution has a support structure that promotes continuous teaching improvement. Academic staff are trained continuously to improve teaching. 5. The institution also provides additional educational programs to cover the continuous training of its personnel and the enhancement of student training. 6. The institution has supporting mechanisms for experimentation in teaching. 7. Academic staff, teaching, scientific supporting staff and administrative staff are committed to improve teaching and application of study programmes.
Research Support	

Quality Standards	Criteria
21. The institution ensures that the research projects contributes to and guarantee a high level of scientific quality in a relevant research area.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution ensures that there is a shared understanding of the nature, role and goals of research. 2. There are standards, procedures and processes for the approval of research proposals, and theses, and the conduct and supervision of research studies. 3. There are policies, research management systems and strategies, adequate infrastructure and resources that facilitate all staff to undertake innovative research, and publish research results; 4. There is effective monitoring and evaluation of the research system. 5. The institution ensures the respect of research ethics.
22. The institution ensures the dynamism of national and international development of its research policy as well as the valorisation and dissemination of its results.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution supports and rewards participation in international research and education programs of teams or individuals. 2. The institution has the ability to identify and mobilize key institutional, scientific and socio-economic interlocutors and key valuation structures 3. The institution knows its human potential, its material and financial resources as well as the opportunities offered by its regional, national and international environment for scientific research. 4. The institution has a monitoring and prospecting structure on scientific and technological developments in its regional, national and international environment. 5. The institution has a relevant, effective and comprehensive strategy for scientific cooperation, aligned with its internationalisation strategy.
23. There is an institutional strategy and programming of research activities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research activity is in compliance with the mission and strategy of Institution and with the developments and important issues in the international level. 2. The vision and strategy of the research are elaborated in consultation with the actors of the institution. 3. The priorities of the research correspond to the objectives of positioning the institution. 4. The institution organizes strategic reflection workshops on its scientific research and innovation policy, using specific external expertise.
24. The institution promotes research and scientific activity in programmes teaching where relevant.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution ensures the development of research teams/groups, research laboratories, organisation of workshops, involvement of the students in research activities; participation of staff and students (MSc / MBA / MA) in scientific conferences. 2. The institution ensures the mutual integration of science and education. 3. The institution ensures that the research work or research findings are integrated into the learning process. 4. The actors of the field of research are involved in the training (diploma editing, educational and administrative responsibilities (master, ED, training networks, etc.). 5. The training fields are backed by the research field (contents of the model, teaching interventions). 6. The institution ensures treatment of interdisciplinary in the articulation of the field of research and the field (s) of formation. 7. The institution has a policy of welcoming and supervising students and doctoral students within the research units. 8. The institution ensures the smooth running of doctoral studies and ensures favorable conditions for the development of research work.

Quality Standards	Criteria
25. The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivise, assess and reward research engagement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution establishes research structures based on criteria that take into account research priorities, scientific skills, human potential and infrastructure. 2. The institution encourages the evolution of research structures through a reflection on trends in the scientific environment, and promotes the grouping, the re-composition of existing entities or the emergence of new relevant structures. 3. The institution monitors and evaluates the institutional (or faculty or departmental) research policy and strategy. 4. The institution has provisions and arrangements for steering, monitoring and regulating its research entities and research programs and initiatives supported. 5. The institution supports the use of peer self-assessment on a regular basis (e.g. before the renewal of their accreditation). 6. The scientific equipment is shared between the various research entities of the institution. 7. The institution supports and rewards research performance, productivity and values scientific impact.
26. The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to foster the production and valorisation of research.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution uses the external evaluation of its system and research entities to identify its research potential and promote excellence in this area. 2. The institution organises the evaluation of doctoral studies on a regular basis. The results of this evaluation are the basis of the improvements made. 3. The institution encourages innovation and the emergence of innovative teams and programs. 4. The institution has an internal and external communication strategy that is relevant and adapted to the different target audiences in the field of research. 5. The institution has a policy of promoting and transferring results of research.
Students and their Support	
27. Admission requirements and student evaluation methods are clear, manageable and publicly made available.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution informs students of training programs, access conditions and evaluation methods. The institution publishes the objectives of each course and the admission procedures (diplomas required, pedagogical prerequisites, selection procedures), as well as the skills to be acquired. 2. The institution applies in a consistent and consistent manner predefined and published rules covering all phases of the study cycle, from the admission and progression of students, to the recognition and certification of their prior learning. 3. The institution informs future students for study programmes that it provides through the career counselling office. 4. Admission requirements and student selection procedures correspond to the standards of the study program. They are realistic with a view to the intended learning outcomes, and the curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students. 5. Information specifically for students with disabilities concerning the study program, education process, admission requirements, and aforementioned compensative measures are documented and published. 6. The institution welcomes and pursues specific policies for absorption and integration of new students.
28. Mechanisms for student support and advice are established	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution fosters the students' contribution to quality improvement of teaching and learning via the consultation individuals or associations.

Quality Standards	Criteria
for successful accomplishment, career preparation and continuation of studies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The institution fosters communication with alumni and the creation of an alumni community. 3. The institution engages in information and orientation of students. 4. The institution has established mechanisms relating to student support and advice. Structure for guiding and advising students supports them in all cycles of study the institution provides. 5. The institution has a structure of information and counselling for students. 6. The institution follows supporting policies for students' progress. 7. The institution applies alternative teaching methods depending on its students' interests. 8. The institution assists and guides students how to find literature. 9. The institution offers courses at its premises to help students in difficulty. 10. The institution provides orientation activities.
29. The institution ensures inclusiveness of any kind of student admitted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning and teaching take into account the diversity of students and their needs, offering flexible learning paths in an inclusive education context. 2. Inst takes care of students who are not adequately prepared for study at the level for which they have been admitted in order to support them to attain appropriate educational goals; 3. The institution supports the use of teaching methods to ensure quality training regardless of student profile. 4. The institution supports research and the implementation of new learning methods to foster interdisciplinary and flexible modes of learning for students to develop transversal skills. 5. The institution has transparently implemented provisions for the promotion of gender equality and equal opportunity for students with particular living circumstances and other vulnerable groups. 6. The institution pursues a policy of support for students with disabilities and chronic illnesses. 7. The institution pursues a policy of support for Roma students and Balkan Egyptians. 8. The institution pursues a policy of support for students engaging in sports activities at high levels. 9. The institution pursues a policy of support for students wishing to pursue part-time studies.
30. The institution has a supportive policy to extra-curriculum activities and rewards the engagement of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For the benefit of the students, institution, and society, the institution incorporates community engagement in its activities, with the objective of: 2. Enriching scholarship, research, and creative activities; 3. The institution pursues a policy to facilitate student life. 4. The institution supports students' cultural life. 5. The institution is actively and regularly involved in regional socio-cultural initiatives. 6. The institution supports students who engage in sports activities organised by its structures and other institutions.

3.3. The Scoring

The purpose of the scoring: checking the quality standards fulfilment

158. The objectives of QA assessment are twofold:

1. Help the institutions improve their capacity;
2. Assess the attainment of the quality expectations.

159. To pursue both objectives, the quality assurance framework will use standards and criteria, and standards for identifying rooms for improvement on quality. It will furthermore use a 4-point rating scale for QA assessment. The rating scale might be used for both objectives as it provides institutions and external evaluators an instrument for scaling their verdicts and to see how far they have progressed in their journey. The 4-point rating scale is described below. It is inspired from the Scottish experience of ELIR, developed by QAA-Scotland and could be easily adapted for ARACIS, pending on the agency's agreement.

ELIR-type scoring, by QAA Scotland²⁵

160. ELIR judgements (scoring) contain two elements:

1. a clear statement on the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for quality and academic standards (the threshold or baseline judgement)
2. a suite of differentiated outcomes identifying good practice (commendations) and areas where the institution is asked to improve, or to review its approach (recommendations).

161. There are three categories of effectiveness, the definitions of which are set out below.

Effectiveness indicates there is evidence that overall:

- the institution has rigorous arrangements, in line with sector expectations, for assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience and for securing the academic standards of its awards, and is using these arrangements systematically

and

- the institution has the capacity and commitment to identify and address situations that have the potential to threaten the academic standards of its awards or the quality of the student learning experience

and

- The institution is meeting sector expectations in having a clearly identified, strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience, which it is implementing systematically, drawing on student views and external reference points to inform strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation.

Limited effectiveness indicates there is evidence that:

- The institution's arrangements for managing the quality of the student learning experience and/or securing the academic standards of its awards are limited currently or are likely to become limited in the future, such that the quality of the student learning experience and/or the academic standards would be placed at risk if the institution did not take action

and/or

- The institution's capacity and/or commitment to identify and address potential risks to the quality of the student learning experience or the academic standards of its award is limited, or is likely to become limited in the future - the limitation may relate to the identification of weaknesses in the institution's procedures or in the implementation of the procedures

and/or

- The institution is not meeting the full range of sector expectations in relation to having a clearly identified, strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience, and/or the arrangements in place for implementing its strategic approach are not fully systematic such that

²⁵ Adapted from ELIR-QAA documents, 2018. *The ELIR Handbook (fourth edition)* sets out the review method that will be applied to Scottish higher education institutions in the period 2017-22.

the institution's capacity or commitment to enhance the quality of the student learning experience is limited.

Not effective indicates there is evidence that:

- There are serious and fundamental weaknesses in the institution's arrangements for managing the quality of the student learning experience and/or securing the academic standards of its awards such that quality and/or academic standards are at immediate risk

and/or

- The institution does not have the capacity and/or the commitment to identify and address risks to the quality of the student learning experience or the academic standards of its awards. There are likely to be serious absences or flaws in the institution's procedures themselves and/or serious weaknesses in their implementation

and/or

- The institution does not meet sector expectations in relation to having a clearly identified, strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience, and/or does not have systematic arrangements in place for implementing its strategic approach such that the institution does not have the capacity or commitment to enhance the quality of the student learning experience.

Making recommendations and highlighting good practice

162. In addition to the threshold or baseline judgement, ARACIS will identify good practice and areas where the institution is asked to improve (recommendations).

3.4. Appeal procedure

163. After the publication of the evaluation report, HEIs have the right to submit a written appeal within two weeks. In this case, ARACIS' Executive Board reviews the report and invites university representatives to a clarification discussion.

Current arrangements

164. New distinct procedures for addressing appeals and complaints were developed and applied after approval of ESG 2015. An overview is presented below. As shown before, in the period 2013 – 2017 there were 46 appeals for study programs (first and second cycle) out of 2.314 evaluations and five at institutional level out of 74 external evaluations. Total or partial acceptance of appeals was: study programs - 16 appeals out of 46; at institutional level - none. Usually, appeals were received in cases when the ARACIS judgment/Advise to the MoNE was at a lower level from the expected one. The institution challenged in general procedural flaws, leading in its opinion to insufficient evidence of the judgment. Complaints may refer to alleged lack of integrity or improper behaviour of external evaluators. If they prove to be supported by facts, these are to be addressed according to the provisions of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. ARACIS has received only one written complaint, from one private university, but there was no evidence of the reality of the situation and the matter was settled with the university without further consequences.

165. ARACIS endeavors to have with higher education institutions constructive collaboration relationships, based on systematic and ongoing communication. In certain situations, higher education institutions may express their dissatisfaction through the submission of complaints and/or appeals.

166. Appeals ("conestații" – in Romanian) can be submitted following the external evaluation conducted by ARACIS evaluation panels. The appeal is made in writing, is signed by the university rector, confirmed with the university stamp/seal and is registered at ARACIS Public Relations, Registry, Archive and Secretariat Office. Appeals may contest the awarded advise/judgment after the external evaluation of study programs or the awarded advise/judgment after the external institutional evaluation.

167. Appeals regarding the awarded Advise after the external evaluation of study programs can be submitted within two weeks from receipt of the report and are analyzed by the Executive Board of ARACIS Council, which designates a commission for resolution of the appeal that analyzes the appeal and documentation resulting from the visit. The commission drafts a report to be validated by the Accreditation

Department. The ARACIS Council, after analyzing the documents and following debates, drafts the final ARACIS Report.

Appeals regarding the awarded Advise/Judgment after the external institutional evaluation

168. Appeals can be submitted within two weeks from the publishing of the report. The Executive Board of ARACIS Council reanalyzes the report and invites the university rector and contact person at ARACIS premises for a clarification discussion. If, after this meeting, the representatives of the higher education institution maintain their appeal, the Executive Board of ARACIS Council shall designate a technical commission for resolution of the appeal, which, based on evaluation documents, checks whether the procedural flaws mentioned in the appeal are real or not. If the procedural flaws are found to be real, the commission proposes to the ARACIS

169. Council to resume the evaluation procedures in order to correct the reported issues. The ARACIS Council approves, at the proposal of the Executive Board, the composition of an additional appeal panel that includes other evaluators who will carry out an additional visit at the higher education institution and who will draft a new report after the visit.

170. Within 5 working days from the ARACIS meeting in which the results of the appeal were approved, the Agency publishes on its website the content of the appeal as well as the Report of ARACIS Council regarding the resolution of the appeal.

171. **Complaints** (“reclamații” – in Romanian). Complaints do not fall under the procedure for appeals against a decision. A complaint may refer to an alleged lack of integrity or improper behaviour on the part of an external evaluator(s). If the complaint can be shown to be factually correct, ARACIS follows the provisions of its ‘Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct’ in providing redress. Complaints can also be made against ARACIS for the way it has undertaken contract work or external evaluations.

172. Complaints can be filled following the external evaluation services carried out by ARACIS. Complaints are made in writing and have to be registered at ARACIS premises within 5 working days from the evaluation visit.

173. Usually, following institutional evaluations, higher education institutions may send some referrals and complaints by means of their response to the Information letter regarding the awarded judgement, and in some cases the evaluation process has been corrected through these referrals.

174. All the other complaints addressed to the Agency by different public institutions or citizens and the content of which does not concern an evaluation process, are settled in accordance with the provisions of Law 233/2002 regulating the petition solving activities with subsequent amendments and completions, transposed into a formalized procedure at the Agency level.

Organisation of the Appeal Commission (suggested regulation)

175. ARACIS, based on Article XX of the approved Government decision n°XXX, published in the Romanian Public Gazette n° XXX. issues the following Regulations:

Art. 1 Duties

The Appeal Commission (Commission) shall deal with requests to reconsider decisions taken by the Executive Board of ARACIS Council. It shall deal only with requests from directly affected HEIs going through the accreditation and audit review process.

The Commission shall fulfil its duty by compiling a documented report on the request.

Art. 2 Composition and Chair

The Commission shall consist of three members elected by the Executive Board of ARACIS Council. The two substitute members are elected as well.

The Commission shall appoint a Chairperson among the three members.

Art. 3 Method of operation

The members of the Commission shall inform the Chairperson of the Commission in writing of their response to the request for reconsideration.

The Chairperson shall summarize the assessments of the members in a report by the Commission.

The Chairperson may convene a telephone conference insofar as this is necessary in order to form a uniform opinion.

Art. 4 Confidentiality

The members have an obligation of confidentiality.

Art. 5 Partiality

Member of the Commission shall not examine requests from HEIs they have belonged to as an academic or staff or cooperated with over the past 5 years.

Art. 6 Deadlines

The Commission must communicate its position to the Executive Board of ARACIS Council within two months of reception of request to reconsider.

2 The Executive Board of ARACIS Council shall deal conclusively with the appeal request in its next meeting.

Art. 7 Secretariat

The office of ARACIS shall carry out any organisational work on behalf of the Commission.

Art. 8 Commencement: these Regulations shall come into effect on XXX.

Chapter 4 - Quality Standards for the Program Accreditation on the Bachelor and Masters Level

The purpose of this chapter

176. This part is a compilation of the relevant **general criteria** for program accreditation on the Bachelor and Master level. It is generally important to note that these general criteria for program accreditation have been drafted in an outcome-oriented fashion. They are also compatible with the European Standards and Guidelines as proposed by the 48 minister of education during their Bologna follow-up conference in Yerevan, Armenia in spring of 2015. In addition, the first part also features supplemental information regarding **the purpose of this document**, the **underlying principles of QA for the ARACIS methodology** as well as **the role of ARACIS as provider of External QA services**.

177. It is important to note that in this chapter, the general program criteria to be used for the purpose of program accreditation are laid down. ARACIS in addition also has developed field specific criteria for Bachelor and Master programs, describing the learning outcomes of Romanian graduates in different fields of study on completion of their respective studies. These are compiled in a separate document and have to be used in conjunction with these general criteria.

178. For completeness sake, it is worth mentioning, that for all engineering programs, ARACIS has been authorized by the European Network for the Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE) to deliver the so called “European Accredited Engineering” quality seal (“EUR-ACE”). The learning outcome description for this separate procedure form also not part of this document.

179. Subsequently, the general criteria/standards to be used in the process of program accreditation on levels 6-7 of the Romanian Quality Assurance Framework are listed. In doing so, the categories used in national legislation have been strictly observed as main structure wherever possible. In the bracket behind each criterion, the corresponding numbers of the European Standards and Guidelines (part 2) are listed.

4.1. Institutional Capacity

A.1 Institutional, administrative and managerial structures

A.1.1 Legal organisational and operating framework

180. The study program is established and operating according to the law (e.g. the compliance with the tuition capacity).

181. The study program is designed in accordance with the Romanian National Qualification Framework (CNC), the National Register of Higher Education Qualifications (RNCIS) and the European Qualification Framework (<https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/home>).

A.1.2 Aims, Learning Outcomes and Qualification Profile of the study program under review

182. The objectives and learning outcomes of the degree programs are rigorously defined in cooperation with relevant stakeholders (e.g. students, alumni, employers) and are made transparent. The higher education institution subsequently does regular consultations with its stakeholders to that regard which take place in an organised manner and the results are adequately documented.

183. The specific profile of the program under review is clearly distinguishable from other programs in the same department. There is consistency between the program objectives, the learning activities of students and the professional profile of the graduates. The graduates of the study program have a clearly defined perspective of the occupation on the labour market. The program outcomes allow graduates to get a job on the labour market in positions that correspond to the obtained qualification.

184. The program learning outcomes and underlying course/module learning outcomes have been established in terms of what students are expected to know and are able to do upon completion of the educational process. They form part of the final Diploma Supplement to be handed to each individual student upon graduation.

A.1.3 Academic integrity

185. The educational institution, offering the respective program, has a code of university ethics and deontology / academic integrity by which it defends the values of the academic freedom, university autonomy, non-discrimination and ethical integrity.

186. It possesses practices and applies clear mechanisms permanently ensuring vigilance with regard to possible frauds or deviations from its academic activities, including active measures to prevent and eliminate any form of plagiarism.

A.1.4 Public liability and responsibility

187. The institution possesses practices for internal audits with regard to the main fields of its activities. An academic audit report reviewed by the Senate and a plan of measures to improve are prepared on an annual basis.

A.1.5 internal Rules and Regulations

188. The institution of higher education has Internal Rules of Procedure and a Regulation for its Academic Activities in general, the programs under review in particular. The regulations are in accordance with the legislation in force and are approved by the University Senate. It has organised the record of the academic activity of the students in accordance with the legislation in force, by forms homologated in this respect (catalogues, summary documents, academic records, transcripts, diplomas etc.).

A.1.6 Financial activity

189. The evaluated study program disposes of sufficient financial resources for its execution. The availability of these resources have to be demonstrated at least for the duration of the accreditation period.

190. The Tuition fees of the students are calculated in accordance with the average tuition costs per university year in the public education sector financed by the state budget in similar fields, and they are presented to students through adequate means of communication. The students are informed with regard to the possibilities of financial assistance provided by the institution and the modality of using the tuition fees.

A.2 Facilities (ESG 1.6)

A.2.1 Availability of educational establishments

191. The institution of higher education disposes of its own premises²⁶ or rented premises which are adequate for carrying out its educational and research activities in the programs to be accredited.

192. The capacity of the educational facilities (class rooms, seminar rooms, laboratories and project rooms) is adequate for the number of students in the programs to be accredited and complies with the legal requirements.

A.2.2 Endowment of the educational establishments

193. The teaching/ seminar rooms dispose of technical equipment that is adequate for teaching and communication. The didactic and research laboratories dispose of specific equipment that ensures the adequate performance of theoretical, applied and practical activities on the qualification level

²⁶ According to legal stipulations, at least 70% of the premises must be owned by the applying institution.

submitted for accreditation. The technical equipment of the laboratories is adequate for reaching the program learning outcomes. There is licensed software, adequate to the content of the disciplines from the program curriculum.

A.2.3 Availability and endowment of scientific research premises

194. The higher education institution disposes of own or rented research premises/research laboratories with equipment adequate to the exigencies of the educational content of the respective program and level of education delivered.

A.2.4 Availability and endowment of the library

195. The higher education institution disposes of library equipped with lecture rooms and own library stock adequate to reach the program learning outcomes. There is a sufficient number of subscriptions to Romanian and foreign publications and periodicals, which corresponds to the mission and aims undertaken by the study program. If the study programs is taught in foreign languages, there are study resources available in the teaching language that are of adequate quality and in a sufficient number of copies.

196. The higher education institution ensures the multiplication of the courses and other didactic material necessary to the educational process and makes them available to students in an adequate number of copies.

A.3 Human resource (ESG 1.5)

A.3.1 Quality of teaching staff

197. The higher education institution employs an adequate number of academic staff with sufficient qualifications for the execution of the program under review for the entire cycle of the study program.

198. The academic staff from the study program are hired according to the recruitment criteria established at institutional level in accordance with the legal provisions. At least 70% of the total jobs of the study program are assigned to tenure teachers in the higher education institution, according to the legal provisions – with basic workload or reserved position, and at least 25% of them are covered by university professors and associate professors. The tenure teachers from the higher education cover, during a university year, maximum three workloads irrespective of the educational institution in which they carry out their activity.

199. The full-time academic staff appointed according to the law, who retired at the age limit or due to other reasons, may work in the capacity of associated academic staff in accordance with the legal provisions, but they may cover at most one workload in the respective educational institution.

200. The tenure teachers have doctoral degree and they comply with at least one of the following conditions: they hold a Bachelor's diploma in the field of the taught disciplines; they are Doctoral supervisors in the field of the taught disciplines; the theme of their doctoral thesis is in the field of the taught disciplines. The other teachers should have the initial training and skills in the field of the taught discipline.)

201. The tenure teachers have prepared courses and other didactic material necessary to the educational process, which fully cover the issues of the respective discipline, in accordance with the subject description (syllabus).

202. The associated teachers are bound to notify in writing the head of the institution where they occupy the primary position as well as the head of the institution in which they are associates with regard to the number of classes taught by association. In case they hold the primary position in another higher education institution, it is necessary to obtain the consent from the university senate of the respective institution. The teachers who occupy positions of assistant have certified pedagogical training.

203. The institution provides to the academic staff opportunities of professional development to improve their teaching skills and the skills of using the new technologies for teaching purposes.

A.3.2 Availability of auxiliary staff necessary to implement the study programme

204. The auxiliary staff who provides the technical support in the didactic and research laboratories is adequate to ensure the performance of the practical activities for the program to be accredited.

4.2. Educational Efficacy

B.1 Content of the study programmes (ESG 1.2, 1.3, 1.4)

B.1.1 Students admission

205. The higher education institution applies a transparent policy of student recruitment and admission, which is publicly announced at least six months prior to the application. The university marketing promotes real and correct information, indicating verification and confirmation possibilities.

206. The students are recruited based on own admission procedures of the institution which are defined separately for each study cycle. The admission is based exclusively on the academic skills of the candidate.

207. The results of student evaluations after the first year of study confirm the adequacy of the admission conditions applied for the evaluated study program; corrective action is taken, where needed.

B.1.2 Structure and delivery of the study program

208. The presented program curriculum is approved at institutional level. The study program is composed of individual modules/disciplines presented in a syllabus containing the objectives, basic thematic content, distribution of the number of courses, seminars and applicative activities etc. by themes, minimal bibliography as well as adequate examination methods for the planned learning outcomes. The syllabi are signed by the course, seminar/ other applicative activity holder and by the head of department.

209. The syllabi provide correlations between the declared learning outcomes, which the discipline contributes to, its content and the modality of evaluating the learning outcomes acquired by the student.

210. The disciplines included in the program curriculum are provided in a logical sequence. The higher education institution disposes of internal mechanisms for the harmonization of the discipline contents and avoidance of their overlapping.

211. The program curriculum consists of fundamentals, domains, specialties and complementary disciplines grouped in mandatory, optional and facultative disciplines in accordance with the regulatory requirements established at national level and with the field specific standards developed by ARACIS.

212. The structure of the study programme remains unchanged for one study cycle; it may be modified only as of the 1st year of the following university year.

213. The curriculum is structured so that graduation is possible in the defined standard period of study.

214. The program curriculum provides for 2-3 weeks of practice per year starting as early as the first year of study. For the practice periods, the higher education institution has concluded collaboration agreements, contracts or other documents with the practice units, in the framework of which the location and period of practice, modality of organisation and guidance, persons in charge from the education institution and practice unit etc. are defined.

B.1.3 Partnerships

215. The partnerships concluded with public and private organisations for the practice of the students are sufficient and of adequate content (with regard to the practice period, number of practice locations, tutorship guaranteed in the company etc.) in order to achieve the expected results of the study program.

216. The partnerships concluded with other higher education institutions from abroad correspond to the purpose of achieving international mobility and achievement of programme outcomes.

B.2 Learning results (ESG 1.3, 1.4)

B.2.1 Passing rate of students

217. The pass rates in the program under review are sufficient²⁷.

218. The institution disposes of internal mechanisms to monitor the student's progression with regard to academic results during the years of study, drop-out rate, credits accumulated by the students which pass from one year into another (as credited students), time to graduation. The results of the monitoring confirm the efficiency of the educational process.

B.2.2 Valorisation of the university qualification by hiring on the labour market or by continuing the university studies

219. The educational institution monitors on ongoing basis the career of its graduates based on a system developed for this purpose, and it annually provides a detailed report regarding the evaluated study program. A number of Key Performance Indicators, defined in the law, have to be reached in the process.

220. The results of the process of monitoring the insertion of the graduates on the labour market, the opinion of the hired graduates and employers with regard to the training during the university studies confirm the value of the obtained qualification, the adequacy of the program aims and outcomes in relation to the needs of the labour market²⁸.

221. The involvement of companies in partnership with the evaluated study program in the graduates employability confirms the value of the obtained qualification, adequacy of the programme aims and outcomes in relation to the needs of the labour market.

B.2.3 Level of satisfaction of the students in relation to the professional and personal development provided by the university

222. The higher education institution collects students' opinion with regard to their satisfaction relative to the educational process, student services and infrastructure provided by the university. The process of monitoring the opinion of the students is adequate with regard to the relevance of the collected information, rate of reply and improvement measures (identified and implemented).

223. By means of monitoring student's opinion with regard to the didactic process the efficiency of the respective process and provided support services is confirmed. More than 50% of the students positively assess the learning/ development environment provided by the university and their own learning path.

²⁷ A minimum 51% of the total graduates of each series have passed the final degree examination. A minimum 40% of the graduates of the first series are hired with legal labour contracts on positions corresponding to the specialization obtained when graduating.

²⁸ At least 50% of the graduates are hired within two years as of graduation at the level of their university qualification. At least 20% of the graduates from the last two series of the study program enrol in Master's degree programs irrespective of the field.

B.2.4 Student centered learning

224. The **didactic process**, the **teaching methods and learning activities** are selected/ conceived in order to ensure the achievement of the program outcomes. They are a reflection of principles of student centered learning, allowing flexible learning paths through optional and facultative disciplines and encouraging students to have a proactive role in the learning process.

225. Teachers flexibly use a variety of pedagogical methods by which they encourage the debates, exchange of opinions and teamwork, including development of transversal skills.

226. The teacher – student relationship is one of partnership, each of them being responsible for obtaining the learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are explained and discussed with the students from the perspective of their relevance for their development.

227. The teaching-learning process considers both face-to-face didactic activities and individual study. The study formations – series, groups, sub-groups – are sized so that to ensure the efficient deployment of the educational process.

228. Teachers use the resources of the new technologies (e.g. email, personal webpage/e-learning platform for themes, bibliography, resources in electronic format and dialogue with the students) and auxiliary materials, from the blackboard to flipchart and video projector etc.

229. The higher education institution has procedures related to recognition of diplomas and completion procedures fit for purpose in cases of students study mobilities and internships (practical stages).

230. Teachers have standby classes available for the students, and they customize the guidance upon the request of the student. There are tutors or other forms of association between a teacher and a group of students.

B.3 Scientific research activity

B.3.1 Research programming

231. The program under review disposes of a scientific plan included in the strategic plan of the faculty and of the institution which it belongs to, being certified with documents kept in the department, faculty etc.

232. The research themes included in the plan are within the scientific area of the field which the accredited study program is part of.

B.3.2 Research resources

233. The research disposes of sufficient financial, logistical and human resources in order to meet the proposed goals.

B.3.3 Performance and valorisation of research

234. Academic Staff carries out scientific research activities in the field of the disciplines. This can be in the form of publications in scientific journals or publishing houses from the country or abroad, scientific papers presented in sessions, symposiums, seminars etc. from the country and/or abroad. Equally contracts, expertise, consultancy etc., based on contracts or agreements concluded with partners from the country and/or abroad, with evaluation certified by specialty commissions, patents and technological transfer through consultancy centres, science parks or other forms of valorisation, development of new products etc.

235. Every teacher has at least one annual publication or didactic or scientific achievement.

236. Students are supported and stimulated to carry out research activities, they are involved in research projects.

237. The faculty organises on a regular basis, scientific sessions, symposiums, conferences, round tables, and the papers are published in scientific volumes with ISBN and ISSN or in proceedings dedicated to the organised activity.

4.3. Quality Management

C.1 Quality assurance strategies and procedures (ESG 1.1)

238. There is a commission for quality assessment and assurance at the level of the faculty/department in charge of the study program, which coordinates the implementation of the quality assessment and assurance procedures and activities.

239. The quality assurance policies and strategies are active in the faculty coordinating the study program, and they stimulate the participation of each member of the didactic and research team and also of the students.

240. The study program is part of the institutional system of internal quality assurance, and it implements the identified measures to improve the quality of the educational process.

241. The educational institution prepares and presents an annual report with regard to the modality of complying with the provisions of the program of quality policies and to the positive and negative aspects of the internal quality assurance, which it makes public.

C.2 Procedures regarding the initiation, monitoring and periodic review of study programs (ESG 1.9)

242. A regulation regarding the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodic review of the study programs exists and it is applied.

243. The study program periodically reviews needs and objectives, learning process, resources, results and management system, in order to guarantee their continuing relevance and effectiveness.

244. The process of periodic review of the study programme considers the interest of the representatives of the labour market for the study programme and the satisfaction regarding the training of students/graduates. It takes into account the interest of the practice partners for the study programme and satisfaction regarding the training of students as well as the results of monitoring the opinion of the students with regard to the didactic process.

245. An annual study programme internal evaluation report is prepared, and it includes proposals to improve the quality of the education.

C.3 The Exam System - objective and transparent procedures for the evaluation of the learning results (ESG 1.3)

246. The higher education institution has a regulation regarding the examination and grading students, which is rigorously and consistently applied.

247. The evaluation methods are diverse and they encourage critical thinking, creativity, and team work.

248. The methods and criteria used to evaluate the students with regard to the developed skills and competences are adequate and allow the verification of actual acquirement by them of the knowledge and skills provided in the discipline syllabi. They are communicated to students at the beginning of the each semester.

249. Besides the course holder, at least another specialty teacher participates in the examination. As regards the evaluation of practical activities, the assessments of the practice tutor from the company where the respective activity was carried out shall be considered.

250. The number and distribution of the forms of examination in a semester are organised so that to ensure the time necessary to the training of the students and deployment of the evaluation process.

251. There are regulations with regard to re-examinations, taking the medically postponed examinations and credited examinations, sanctioning the frauds discovered during examinations, other circumstantial situations.

252. The completion of studies implies the preparation of a graduation thesis, which demonstrates the capacity of the student to fulfil an independently assigned task at the level of the imposed standards.

253. In the process of evaluating the graduation theses with themes proposed by/ prepared in collaboration with the industry, the assessments of the company representative in collaboration with whom the respective activity was carried out shall be considered. Representatives of the industry are invited to participate in the presentation of the graduation theses.

254. There is an official **appeals system** for the students in place to contest the evaluation and to solve the appeals, which is presented to the students.

C.4 Procedures of regular quality assessment of the academic staff (ESG 1.5)

255. The internal peer-review is organised on regular basis, being based on general criteria and clear, transparent and public procedures.

256. The academic staff carries out self-evaluation and it is also evaluated by the head of the department.

257. The evaluation by students is mandatory. There is an evaluation form provided to students to evaluate all their teachers, being approved by the senate and applying after each semester training cycle. It is filled-in exclusively in the absence of any external factor and by guaranteeing the confidentiality of the appraiser.

C.5 Accessibility of the adequate learning resources (ESG 1.3, 1.6)

258. The study programme provides relevant support to students for the learning process (career advice, tutorship and assistance), in this way facilitating the acquirement of knowledge and skills and passing in a superior year of study.

259. There is sufficient personnel with adequate training to provide support services to students.

260. The faculty disposes of incentive programmes for the students with outstanding results and recovery programmes for the students with learning difficulties. Teachers have standby classes available for the students, and they customize the guidance upon the request of the student. There are tutors or other forms of association between a teacher and a group of students.

261. The faculty, through the university, disposes of social, cultural and sports services for students, like: accommodation premises for at least 10% of the students, sports centre, various advisory services, which have an efficient management. The students are informed on the existence of such services.

262. The faculty, through the university, disposes of social, cultural and sports services for students, like: accommodation premises for at least 10% of the students, sports centre, various advisory services, which have an efficient management. The students are informed on the existence of such services.

263. The teacher – student relationship is one of partnership, each of them being responsible for obtaining the learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are explained and discussed with the students from the perspective of their relevance for their development.

264. The students are supported in understanding the necessity of continuing their education through lifelong learning in order to maintain, after graduation, an updated level of their knowledge in the studied field.

265. The higher education institution has structures and procedures to facilitate the mobility of the students in the same system or between different systems of higher education, like the International Relation Office, commissions for the recognition of formally or non-formally acquired qualifications/skills and competences, etc.

266. The higher education institution has regulated the procedure for the promotion of the student from one year of study into another, depending on the accumulated ECTS study credits, and also the procedure of covering two years of study in a single year, in accordance with the legal regulations in force.

267. The higher education institution has recognition and completion procedures fit for purpose in cases of students study mobility and student practice.

C.6 Information management (ESG 1.7)

268. At faculty level, the institution has an IT system in place which facilitates the collection, processing and analysis of data and information relevant for the efficient organisation and operation of the study programmes and of the other activities.

C.7 Transparency of the information of public interest with regard to the study programmes (ESG 1.8)

269. The study programme provides complete, updated and easily accessible, both quantitative and qualitative, public information on the aims, teaching-learning process, resources, results and management system.

270. The graduates receive, free of charge, the Diploma Supplement, which contains all the information provided by the regulations in force.

C.8 Quality assurance by periodic external review (ESG 1.10)

271. With regard to the evaluated study programme, the educational institution complies with the legal provisions regarding the external cyclical review.

Chapter 5 - Overarching Methodology for Program Accreditation

272. This part focuses on the **relevant procedures** used by ARACIS in its program accreditation process. It elaborates in detail the **different steps for initiating and implementing an ARACIS program accreditation procedure**. In the suite, information concerning **the conduct of the on-site visit** is provided. Subsequently the **potential outcomes of an accreditation procedure and follow up processes** are explained, followed by **advice of what to observe when writing a Self-Assessment Report**. Finally, the **ARACIS method of selecting qualified experts** is presented.

273. This methodology applies to the:

- Authorization of the provisional functioning of the new Bachelor/Master degree programs initiated and proposed by the accredited higher education institutions;
- Reaccreditation of Bachelor and Master programs in regular intervals.

274. It applies to all fields of study and modes of delivery (full-part time, traditional, distributed as well as distance, e-learning programs), as well as joint/ double degree programs alike. Whereas the general criteria apply to Bachelor and Master programs in the same manner, some of the Key Performance Indicators, laid down as thresholds in the government regulations²⁹, will be different for these two levels. These specific KPIs related to level 6 and 7 of the Romanian qualification framework have been added as addendums to this central core document, and are part of the “Check List” used by the external evaluators of ARACIS in the execution of the external audit.

5.1. The Role of ARACIS in program accreditation

275. ARACIS has been entrusted by the law to conduct program accreditation on the national and international level. ARACIS by its activities strives to permanently improve HE program quality through:

- evaluating, revising and improving the quality criteria, standards and performance indicators, while correlating them with the qualification requirements in the field of higher education;
- honestly and rigorously identifying achievements and deficiencies with the support of experienced and trained experts in the respective field of study;
- promoting achievements and rapidly addressing deficiencies while considering actual outcomes as a reference for evaluation;
- thereby increasing the level of reference standards and of corresponding performance indicators, in each institution, in compliance with its mission;
- ensuring a clear, consistent and coherent communication with the beneficiaries;
- correctly informing the public with regard to the outcomes achieved and the intended improvements.

5.2. The Procedure of Program Accreditation

The Various Steps for Initiating and Implementing an Accreditation Procedure with ARACIS

276. This section presents a concise description of the necessary steps to be followed in the execution of an external review/programme accreditation/evaluation procedure conducted by ARACIS.

277. The higher education institution in need of a program accreditation procedure as a first step submits a request to the **ARACIS Quality Assurance Direction** requesting the provisional authorizing (AP), the (re)accreditation (A) or the periodic evaluation (EVP) of one or more study programs on the First (Bachelor) or Second Cycle (Master). In the so-called **Programme Accreditation Request Form**, it

²⁹ Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 regarding the quality assurance of education, approved with amendments by Law no. 87/2006, as amended and supplemented.

will indicate the fields of study of the respective program and the level of education of the educational offering (Bachelor or Master level). Special Inspectors in the above mentioned Quality Assurance Direction will check the eligibility of the request.

278. ARACIS will on the basis of the information provided submit an **Accreditation Contract** to the HEI indicating the number of experts to visit the institution, the accreditation fee to be paid, as well as an indicative timetable for the review procedure.

279. Once the contract is signed, the **Department of Accreditation within ARACIS** will nominate an expert panel usually consisting of 3-4 experts from academia and industry. In the case of cluster accreditation, in which a considerable number of programs are bundled, the standard size of the audit team can be increased. The experts are specialists from the respective disciplines for which accreditation is sought.

280. In a next step the **ARACIS Council** will validate the suggestion of the Department of Accreditation for the composition of the expert panel and inform the HEIs. The HEIs can object to the proposed panel by giving valid reason for their non-suitability. In such a case the ARACIS Council will substitute individual members of the panel. Representatives of the reviewed programs can however not propose individual experts on their own.

281. The HEIs submits to ARACIS a **Self-Evaluation Report (SAR)** within 90 days after signing the contract. **The SAR will be structured according to the Criteria listed in part 1 of this document** and will be checked for formal completeness by the Special Inspectors in the ARACIS QA Direction for formal completeness.

282. Subsequently the self-evaluation report is sent to the appointed team of experts which will analyse it within 15 days. The experts can ask for additional information within another 15 days from sending out the requests for clarification.

283. The expert team will then conduct an **on-site review visit** on the agreed date to the higher education institution requesting the accreditation. The deadline for conducting a periodic external evaluation/accreditation is of maximum 6 months as of the date when the request for evaluation was recorded.

284. During the on-site visit, the experts will discuss the SAR and any other aspects deemed relevant with the program coordinators and other stakeholder groups related to the programs under review.

285. The outcomes of the accreditation visit will be documented by the review team in the **draft/proposal of the external evaluation report**. This document will be signed by all team members and by the representatives of the higher education institution under accreditation. When drafting the Site visit sheet, the data presented by the HEI for each program selected will be considered.

286. This draft external evaluation report will in the next stage be presented **to the relevant Permanent Speciality Commission** for analysis and endorsement. This Commission shall prepare a report presenting the visit outcomes and suggesting to keep or discontinue the accreditation.

287. This report is then submitted for analysis to the Accreditation Department of the ARACIS Board and, after that, to the ARACIS Board.

288. As last step the ARACIS Board shall prepare the ARACIS Board Report which will be published on the ARACIS website and also send to the MoNE.

The Conduct of the On-Site Visit

289. The evaluation visit shall take 2-3 days, including both the evaluation team's meetings and the visit of the higher education institution.

290. The evaluation visit includes a preliminary team meeting, before the visit per se, to identify the information that should be received during the visit, based on the Self-evaluation report analyzed.

291. During the on-site visit itself, the following meetings are scheduled:

- First a meeting with the management of the HEI/department/faculty/HEI is conducted. During this meeting, mainly the following topics are of concern;
- A meeting with the teaching staff conducting didactic and support activities for the programs under review;
- A meeting with a representative group of students enrolled in the programs from the field under evaluation, including students representing student organizations;
- A meeting with representatives of the employment sector in which graduates from the programs under review typically work;
- A meeting with alumni of the programs under review;
- A visit of the facilities.

292. During the on-site visit the experts will also check the results of students work (such as exams, final projects etc.) in order to come to a conclusion whether the intended learning outcomes for the programs under review have been reached or not. At the end of the visit, a summary of the evaluation team's opinion will be presented to the representative of the HEIs under review.

Potential Outcomes of an Accreditation Procedures and corresponding Follow Up Processes

Accreditation without Requirements

293. If all quality standards have been fulfilled, the accreditation will be for the full duration of 6 years.

Accreditation with Requirements

294. Within one year from issuing the report concluding that the quality standards were not fully met by the field(s) of study for degrees, the education provider shall request a new evaluation from ARACIS. Otherwise, the report is final, in virtue of Art. 34, paragraph (2) of GEO 75/2005.

Monitoring activities

295. If the external evaluation of a program resulted in recommendations, higher education institutions will submit a report on their progress, within 2 years as of the evaluation. This report will be analysed by the Permanent Experts Commission of ARACIS, which will look at the recommendations progress and will issue conclusions in this sense, highlighting the measures still to be implemented, if applicable, and the deadline for submitting a new report.

Substantive Changes during the Accreditation Period

296. In case a program accredited by ARACIS is experiencing substantive changes in terms of available financial or staff resources or curricular content, the ARACIS headquarters and the experts have to be notified.

297. ARACIS reserves the right to decide, whether this change is of a nature which requires another external review measure.

The Self Assessment Report (SAR) as Part of the Accreditation Process

298. In the following, ARACIS has compiled suggestions for writing and structuring the Self-Assessment Report for the program accreditation procedure. The accreditation process is based on a so called Self-Assessment report by the applying institution of higher education. The preparation of the self assessment report offers the opportunity to use internal quality management systems and self examination processes in order to involve relevant stakeholder groups and to identify possible areas of improvement for the (further) development of a degree programme.

299. Ideally, the accreditation process will be utilized by the Higher Education Institution as a quality development project and will not be seen as a formal inspection routine.

300. The self-assessment report is created in two steps. The higher education institution uses the self-assessment report to analyse in an aggregated manner if and how the degree programme/s fulfil/s the accreditation criteria and which particularities have to be taken into account. Variations from the criteria can be explained.

301. There should be a special focus on evaluation and assessment rather than on mere description, including, for example strengths and weaknesses, challenges and envisaged solutions. The “guiding questions”, contained in the ARACIS checklist are designed to give some assistance in that respect.

302. The self-assessment report is also a guide through the complementary attachments. Typically, a short and concise evaluation of each criterion together with a reference to the relevant attachment will be sufficient.

Selection of Peers

303. ARACIS applies a rigorous procedure in the identification and training of its experts conducting program accreditation procedures on the Bachelor and Master level.

304. As a minimum requirement, the team will consist of experts from academia (professors and students) as well as industry representatives. The student representative shall be appointed by of the student associations federations. If that field of study also includes (Master) programs with part-time attendance (FR), one of the evaluators will come from the ID/FR Commission.

305. The president of the visiting Commission will be appointed by the members of the Permanent Experts Commission relevant for the degree field under evaluation. When appointing the team of evaluating experts, ARACIS will if feasible, take into consideration a fair gender balance.

Chapter 6 - Internal Quality Assurance Guidelines

6.1. Introduction

306. The challenge for all higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide is how best to meet both national and international standards whilst still retaining their uniqueness and personality. Whilst a number of HEIs in Romania enjoy good reputations for their quality, the new national approach, derived from the Reform, represents both a challenge and an opportunity for all HEIs to publically demonstrate how good they are and how they are improving. In line with European and global trends, Romanian HEIs will, from now on, be evaluated through a new consistent set of criteria and procedures, at both the institutional and program level, which will put forward the national quality assurance (QA) system as a result of its continuous enhancement process started at the beginning of the 2000s.

307. Consequently, the focus on the internal quality assurance (IQA) processes made by this document shows the new stage reached by the Romanian HEIs after more than a decade of external QA procedures led by ARACIS and supported by all the stakeholders involved in the higher education sector, following the national higher education strategy established by the ministry in charge of higher education in the long term.

308. Currently, HEIs in Romania will be subject to a new adaptation of external quality assurance following the spirit of reform that spreads out the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the last five years. ARACIS will continue to play the major role in undertaking this process implementing new procedures concerning institutional and program accreditation deeply rooted in the previous experience of the whole HE system in Romania and its own particular experience reinforced after three successful external reviews against the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) coordinated by ENQA.

309. The new procedures need to take into consideration the previous experience and the feedback coming from HEIs and stakeholders identifying weaknesses and misunderstandings derived from the analysis made in a classical enhancement-led process.

310. These Guidelines need to be based on the long and outstanding experience in IQA processes developed by many Romanian HEIs within the QA framework in force in the country since the adaptation to the Bologna Declaration took place in the country. Therefore, the Guidelines take a “national benchmark” on IQA as a point of reference, which has been checked and contrasted in a series of interviews with Romanian universities. The sample could not be systematic in terms of the quantity of the universities interviewed, but it has been absolutely representative of the current state of the art of IQA processes according to the legal framework in force and the external QA procedures that the Romanian HEIs mandatorily have to deal with.

311. This “national benchmark” in terms of IQA management is clearly defined by the requirements set up by the corresponding legal rules and the evaluation procedures implemented by ARACIS. But this benchmark is also sensitive to the cycle of improvement accomplished by particular universities which show a sound commitment towards the consolidation of a quality culture at the HEI level beyond the sheer compliance with the national QA regulations as part of the university’s own mission and vision and reflected in its governance strategy.

312. Of course, such panorama always implies an uneven situation with universities showing a wide range of positions in the overall picture of IQA management. The external evaluation procedures run by ARACIS can show a detailed picture of each HEI highlighting how big and different the room between a threshold and an excellent compliance can be filled in. It can also provide evidences on the diversity of ways universities show compliance according to their own self requirements derived from their particular missions and nature and their students.

313. The diversity of IQA management in the Romanian universities also rests in the different ways they organize their IQA structures and channel the information gathered by the internal system toward their decision making mechanisms and bodies.

314. Before the mandatory rule for a university of establishing a Quality Commission and particular QA bodies at the department, faculty and institution level, each university defines their roles and coordinates IQA processes according to its own autonomy.

315. The objective of the IQA Guidelines is to contribute to provide HEIs with a general framework flexible to be adapted according to their diversity and individual nature, but identifying a set of shared criteria which allow ARACIS to establish a common and fair external evaluation procedure designed from the experience gathered by the Agency and the HEIs for a mature system and according to the stage of development of the national system.

316. This national procedure has to be naturally based on the ESG, particularly in Part 1 concerning the IQA processes run by the HEIs. This happens in a very specific time after ARACIS has overcome its third external review against the ESG coordinated by ENQA.

317. Finally, the new procedure should also demonstrate that the next step in the development of a quality culture in the higher education sector as a whole requires the recognition of a diverse development of QA in the HEIs. That means that the new procedure should use a risk-based methodology which will be able to reduce the pressure of the external QA processes to the HEI, where the university has showed a high level of self-requirement in terms of IQA management, focusing on those dimensions of quality in HEIs where the external procedures have identified a need for improvement.

318. This new approach means to share the responsibility of QA with those HEIs with a mature IQA (a more institutionalized quality culture), without reducing the responsibility for both student protection, in terms of the program he or she is enrolled, and society safeguard, in terms of the quality of the graduated. This “mature IQA management”, and the associated QA procedure, should put the emphasis on mechanisms implemented by the IQA body of the university through periodical internal audits or assessments to comply with the institutional requirements and therefore with the national ones.

319. This approach allows the national QA body to focus on the outcomes of the IQA system rather to maintain the traditional comprehensive scrutiny. This approach turns to be more efficient for both the HEI and the QA agency and gives the latter the opportunity to focus to a more outcome-based accreditation procedures.

320. Cultural change rarely happens strictly from within. Enhancement-led strategies at the HEI level have an obvious positive impact on the maturity of the implementation of a effective IQA management. But a real cultural change and the establishment of a “quality culture” in a HEI is almost always the result of an external driving force which in the higher education sector comes with an important reform in the legal framework or at least in the policies derived from it.

321. But any change must recognize and respect the effort made by the stakeholders involved in the sector and the existing “national benchmark”, as part of a system in constant evolution in an internationalized higher education context in Europe.

322. It is not another change of paradigm, as it was in 2005 with the adaptation to the European Higher Education Area, but the need to introduce improvements to the system after its first ten years of implementation, based on the experience gained by the HEIs and the QA body and the information derived from the processes accomplished. The new criteria for external and internal QA procedures will need to be applied within the contexts of the different visions, missions and objectives of the individual HEIs, and how they manage their different approaches to the delivery of their programs and research.

323. The following pages provide a description of the proposed QA guidelines and process to be implemented at Romanian universities by their QA units or departments. The Guidelines are based on the AUDIT Procedure run by the National Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) since 2008 and revised and updated in 2016. The AUDIT Criteria are based in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality of Higher Education (ESG), whose revised version was approved in the Ministerial Conference of the Bologna Follow-up Group held in Yerevan in May 2015.

324. The Guidelines show the process to adopt an Internal Quality Assurance System by institutions bearing in mind that the Romanian universities do not start from scratch in terms of internal QA processes. But the Guidelines' purpose is twofold: on the one hand systematize a set of shared Principles to be used for internal QA purposes by the universities involved in the, and on the other hand to promote an ESG-rooted set of Criteria in order to establish an academic community among the Romanian institutions which could favor further cooperation projects and recognition of mobility arrangements.

6.2. The Purpose and Scope of the Guidelines

325. An implicit assumption at the start is that the European Standards and Guidelines must still provide the basis for the Guidelines. The experience gained in Romania by ARACIS and the HEIs has clearly demonstrated, amongst many things, that:

- A QA system must be based on principles and standards agreed with the key stakeholders – and include clear procedures and criteria.
- The purposes and scope of the Guidelines must be 'matched' to the QA requirements and expectations placed on the Romanian universities,
- The Guidelines must also be related to the various external QA procedures that the Romanian universities must, and/or opt, to fulfil.
- The Guidelines are thus likely to need to cover the following issues:
 - ✓ the strengthening of the internal QA arrangements within a university concerning the roles and responsibilities of the institution as a whole
 - ✓ the maintenance of strong internal QA arrangements within an university concerning the roles and responsibilities of the institution as a whole
 - ✓ the monitoring and coordination of internal QA activities that are required as evidence for period external evaluation of the institution as a whole
 - ✓ the establishment of internal QA arrangements for the programs an institution offers
 - ✓ the continued monitoring of internal QA arrangements for the programs an institution offers
 - ✓ the analysis of internal QA outcomes to support improvement and enhancement.
 - ✓ the monitoring (and co-ordination) of program proposals submitted from an HEI for external evaluation / accreditation.
- The Guidelines must be applicable within the different management models used with HE institutions. These can, for the purposes of QA, be largely grouped into:
 - ✓ arrangements under which the lead management group maintain control over all internal QA including practical implementation – often under the particular responsibility of one or more of the vice-rectors. Typically the vice-rector academic might take responsibility for all QA relating to teaching and learning (and probably research), whilst a vice-rector 'management/resources' might be responsible for governance-related matters. There are of course some areas of overlap, for example those aspects of human resources including teaching and research staff, that will need to be clarified.

- ✓ arrangements under which, whilst the lead management maintains responsibility for overall quality, the 'practicalities' are devolved to, for example, a faculty, department or even a program level; with a reporting system to ensure that senior management remains informed about current activities and outcomes.

326. There may be no need for the Guidelines to be directly involved with matters relating to the development and establishment of an HEI and its required external accreditation or any other external-led procedure, other than to provide support for the way(s) in which the proposed university might set out its plans for subsequent internal QA.

6.3. Principles

327. In determining where the key principles lie it may first be worth considering the overall purposes for which QA is being undertaken. For higher education in general these may be summarized:

- Is the institution offering the study programs bona fide?
- Does the institution have the resources to offer its program?
- Are its programs designed to meet the outcomes and standards that may be reasonably expected of the program names/titles?
- Do students get a fair opportunity to complete their studies?
- Is student's work assessed fairly, consistently and rigorously?
- Do student's achievements match with general expectations associated with the degree/award title?

328. The general principles that underpin all aspects of QA in higher education are that quality assurance should:

- be an integral part of the internal management of the institution, whether directed specifically at teaching, learning and research, or at the support and other functions the HE institution operates
- be relevant, valid and proportionate to its specific aims and the risks it seeks to cover, and be applied consistently
- reflect the interests of students, employers and society more generally
- recognize the central importance of institutional autonomy, and the HEI's primary responsibility for the quality of education it provides
- be aligned with the legal, pedagogical and social contexts in which the HEI operates
- include a focus on improvement / enhancement, in addition to monitoring whether necessary standards and expectations are being met
- lead to reports that are easily accessible and comprehensible to the general public.

6.4. Quality Assurance Guidelines

329. The proposed QA guidelines have been developed considering the following:

- the Guidelines must be applicable within the different management models used with HE institutions
- the Guidelines are developed within the framework of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education
- the Guidelines must be related to the various external QA procedures that Romanian universities must and opt to fulfil (either national or international such as discipline labels)
- the Guidelines must include some consideration of learning outcomes and, linked through these, the quality control/assurance of student assessment

- since a number of Romanian universities are internationalized in so far as they attract foreign students and produce graduates who find employment and career development abroad, the Guidelines should ideally also reflect international norms and expectations.

330. These Guidelines for IQA are designed to work aligned to the Romanian national requirements issued by ARACIS in charge of the accreditation at the institutional and program level, and help prepare universities for the external evaluations and the expectations of the public in general.

6.5. Suggested methodology to implement the Guidelines

331. The set of principles underpinning the document of Guidelines is largely based upon the experience of different European models in developing the procedure on the evaluation of the Internal Quality Assurance Systems.

332. The procedure has been designed from the perspective of the European Standards and Guidelines and focused on the identified needs of a wide range of higher education institutions in implementing their own IQA assurance systems to comply with both the compulsory national accreditation procedures, but also with the requirements defined by the European Standards and Guidelines whose revision was approved in the Ministerial Conference at Yerevan in 2014.

333. Therefore, the IQA procedure is designed as a supporting tool for institutions regardless their own awareness and development of IQA systems but also as a means to comply with the national and international expectations of the individual higher education institutions towards their particular mission and vision.

334. ARACIS is responsible for external evaluation of Romanian universities. These Guidelines for internal quality assurance are designed to work with ARACIS requirements, and help prepare universities for the external evaluations and the expectations of the public in general.

335. The interviews held with representatives of Romanian universities in charge of QA processes have shown that the concept of QA is embedded in most universities' regulations derived from the national legal regulations. However, in order to renovate/reinvigorate this concept, Romanian HEIs should develop and implement proper IQA systems, beyond the identification of the QA bodies defined by the law, with clear documentation of QA concepts and usage of QA terminology. The institution has to design measurable QA criteria to suit its own objectives, mission and vision.

336. The implementation of IQA system can be modelled as top down or bottom up approaches where ideas and processes flow primarily in one direction. This one-way flow does not guarantee that delivery is smooth and the momentum of initiative keeps its birth strength. Most probably, such models will not end up with their initially anticipated outcomes. However, an optimal model for the Romanian universities, combining both directions in all QA activities (ideas, procedures, etc.) is identified as a fundamental key for a successful IQA system, with the QA units or departments being the core of this system and also the hub of the relationship between the HEI and the national QA agency. Such a bi/multidirectional flow system is crucial to the success of both the national ambitions for international transparent QA outcomes, and also for HEI's efforts to enhance their own activities, and have their advances recognized.

337. Engagement of the whole HEI staff is crucial to ensure a successful IQA system. All stakeholders should be involved in IQA activities according to their roles in HEIs. It is essential for top administration to demonstrate actively support and engagement with all QA activities from planning to implementation. Spreading QA culture among all of an HEI's stakeholders is the greatest task of QA units and its staff. Faculty members and administrative staff should be encouraged to be more enthusiastic about, and where necessary directed in, implementing QA principles in their daily work.

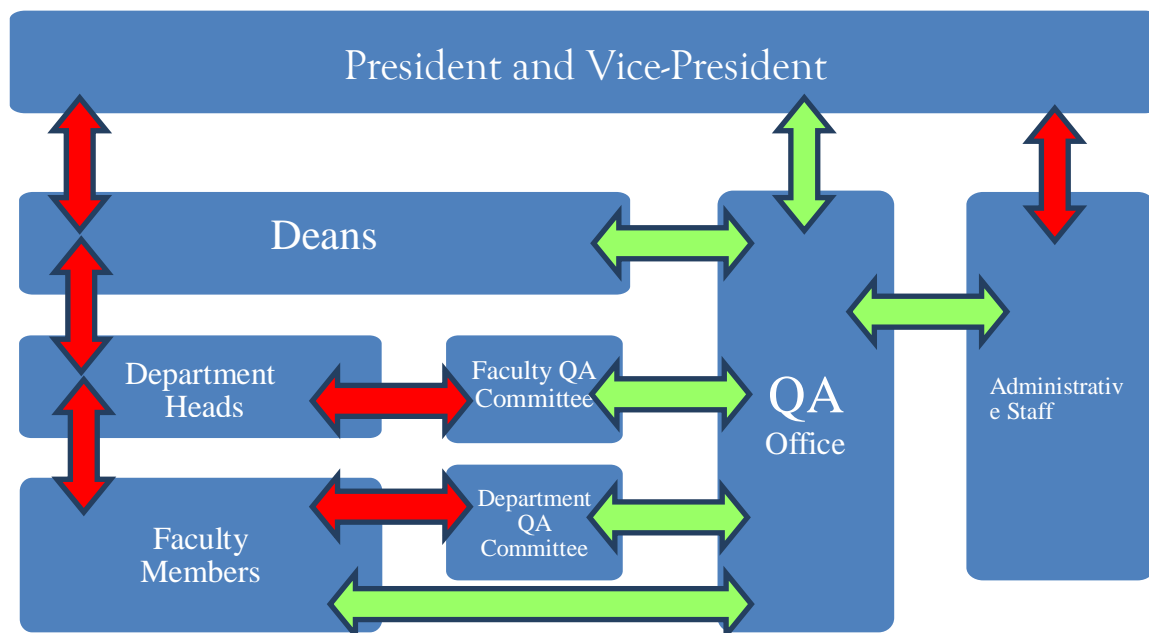


Figure: Optimal model for IQA with QA unit being its core (Green arrows: activities related directly to QA Office, Red arrows: activities where QA Office has implicit engagement).

6.6. Policy Proposal for the enhancement of quality assurance in Romanian HEIs

338. The experience cumulated by the Romanian QA system throughout its development since 2005 have clearly demonstrated that, with coordinated political, academic and managerial/administrative support, significant and demonstrable advances can be coordinated in the quality assurance of higher education, irrespective of diverse contexts and cultures at institutional, national and regional levels, and at a time of financial constraints after the 2008 crisis.

339. It is clear, not only from the Romanian case that the external evaluation of higher education is in a constant state of change. Such changes may involve the organizations themselves, their governance/management, the procedures they undertake and the standards and criteria that are applied within those procedures. Despite the multiple and different contexts, and in particular the current financial constraints in many countries, the QA of HE remains a 'success story' at a European level. This is because countries are, through their national and/or regional agencies, seeking to apply the ESG in ways in which the underlying principles are matched to local contexts.

340. In terms of inputs into the development of a new set of Guidelines for QA in Romanian HEIs the key messages may include:

- despite the success of the Bologna process there is no single (simple or complex) QA model that is applied across Europe / the EHEA
- the development of QA systems takes time during which the context in which the QA is being applied will almost certainly be changing and the expectations of the outcomes of the QA will be changing
- to be rigorous, yet retain the ability to adapt to changing contexts and expectations, a QA system must be based on principles and standards agreed with the key stakeholders procedures and criteria can and will change.

341. It is very clear that the explicit impact on IQA within European universities varies markedly. Within the overall 'political' context of the Bologna Process, the expectations, requirements and practical implementation by national and regional QA agencies vary hugely. Similarly there are enormous variations in the extents to which and ways in which individual universities organize their

IQA. Yet many if not most of the expectations of ESGs are addressed to a greater or lesser extent. It is also notable that these are addressed in constantly changing/evolving contexts

342. Utilizing the evidence base constructed through the previous experience of the HEIs and the national QA body in Romania, it can be concluded that policy and practical development in Romania concerning the QA should give special attention to the following themes:

1. A shared concept of IQA systems facilitated by ARACIS according to a new and updated QA culture to promote a clear and shared understanding of responsibilities and expectations after the experience developed in the national system in the last 15 years
2. A review/revision of the IQA criteria to align with the latest trends concerning the internationalization of universities and promote and prioritize achievements and outcomes (over or in addition to input measures)
3. The development of a QA model that clearly identifies the necessary flows of information for effective and efficient management, and is adaptable to the different contexts and priorities of different HEIs
4. The roles and responsibilities of QA body(ies) within each university, including the identification of where authority for ensuring QA activities resides (and when it may be delegated)
5. Enhancing the engagement of all stakeholders in higher education concerning their expectations about quality and how it can be improved.

6.7. Structure in the defining and documenting of internal quality assurance systems

a) Aims and principles of action

343. The design of internal quality assurance systems is an essential element in the policy and educational activities of an HEI; the goals that it seeks to achieve through the implementation of an IQAS must therefore be set in advance.

344. When producing an IQAS, the HEI will need to comply with the following principles of action:

- Legality and legal certainty: The HEI shall design its internal quality assurance system in accordance with prevailing university legislation and the standards and guidelines for quality assurance laid down in the European Higher Education Area.
- Publicity, transparency and participation: The HEI shall disseminate the process whereby its internal quality assurance system has been produced, establish procedures to facilitate the incorporation of proposals and reports produced during this process, and make it possible for all stakeholders to participate.

b) Stakeholders

345. The HEI must state the stakeholders who are targeted by the system. This will therefore include the groups that are directly and indirectly involved in higher education quality assurance processes: students; manager, teaching and research staff, and administration and services staff at the institution; education authorities; Employers; society.

c) Stages

346. The design of the internal quality assurance system will of necessity include the defining of a series of stages that involve:

- Gathering and analysis of information.
- The control, periodic review and continuous enhancement of actions.
- The mechanisms and strategies for decision-making, especially those affecting programmes of study.

- Accountability to the stakeholders regarding actions carried out, especially those concerning programmes of study.

d) Scope

347. When defining internal quality assurance systems, the HEI must at least consider the elements that affect programmes of study:

Design of the programmes offered:

- Definition of quality policy and goals
- Definition and approval of programmes of study
- Student admission criteria
- Planning of the programmes offered
- Criteria for the eventual suspension of a programme of study

Classroom activities and student-orientated actions:

- Student reception and learning support activities
- Development of programmes offered
 - Teaching-learning methodology
 - Learning assessment
- Work experience and student mobility
- Careers guidance
- Evaluation and enhancement of the programmes offered
 - Implementation of detected enhancement actions
- Handling of complaints and appeals
- Administration of student records and certificates

Academic staff and auxiliary teaching staff:

- Recruitment, evaluation, promotion, training, recognition and support for teaching

Physical resources and services:

- Design, management and enhancement of classrooms, workspaces, laboratories and experimental spaces, libraries and library collections.
- Resources and services for learning and student support

Learning outcomes:

- Measurement, analysis and use of outcomes:
 - graduate employment
 - academic
 - satisfaction of the different stakeholders

Public information:

- Dissemination of updated information on programmes.

e) Procedures

348. According to the degree of complexity and the need for control over the processes to be included in the internal quality assurance system, an analysis will be necessary of the advisability of whether these are to be documented in the form of procedures, flow diagrams, process files, etc., where an adequate description is given of their goal, scope, responsibilities, reference documentation, description of the process, type of control, etc.

f) Organisation, structure and resources

349. The HEI must specify the organisational and structural aspects, in addition to the resources, that will support and structure the internal quality assurance system.

These aspects include:

- Organisation chart and structure of the HEI.
- Responsibilities and functions of the administrative and governing bodies, especially those associated with programmes of study.
- Academic staff and auxiliary teaching staff linked to the HEI.
- Committees and similar bodies that, within the scope of the HEI and departments, are involved in developing any processes.
- Regulations, protocols and procedures that already regulate the HEI's activities, especially those associated with the quality assurance of programmes of study.

350. In addition to the above, the HEI must take into consideration all resources and structures that have contributed to the quality assurance of programmes of study prior to the system being designed.

6.8. General guidelines for the Internal QA system procedure

351. A set of Guidelines for establishing a fit-for-purpose Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) is provided in the following pages with the objective of having a general framework that can be agreed on and shared by ARACIS and the Romanian HEIs.

352. These guidelines include in their 9 headings those elements that should be at the core of an IQAS exercise, but that could be formulated in different ways in the case that some Romanian universities had already developed their own IQAS according to the text defined by the Law.

353. Flexibility in the procedure should be a general principle for the current reform of QA of higher education in Romania. Therefore, the tool used by the universities to show their internal QA arrangements to govern quality by themselves and to promote the establishment of a quality culture at the institutional level has certainly to be flexible as well.

354. But the small set of principles and guidelines underpinning the understanding of IQA in Romania must necessary be shared and, therefore, agreed on among the national accreditation body, ARACIS (backed by the law and the ministry in charge of QA of higher education) and the Romanian universities and higher education stakeholders.

355. **The guidelines are detailed described as follows:**

1. Quality policy and goals.

The HEI needs to consolidate a quality culture which is supported by a policy and goals for quality that are made known and are publicly accessible.

356. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidences to:

- a) Make a written public statement that sets out its quality policy, together with its scope and goals.
- b) State the stakeholders involved in defining the quality policy.
- c) Integrate different elements (bodies, procedures, processes, etc.) to establish a system whereby this quality policy can be implemented.
- d) Establish actions to define, approve, review and improve the quality policy and goals.
- e) Determine the accountability procedure (how, who, when) with the stakeholders regarding compliance with the quality policy and fulfilment of the quality goals.

2. The quality of the programs.

The institution must have mechanisms to maintain and update its programs and develop methodologies to approve, control, evaluate and periodically improve their quality.

357. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidences to:

- a) Determine the bodies, stakeholders, and procedures involved in the design, control, planning, development and periodic review of degrees, their goals and associated competences.
- b) Have systems to gather and analyse information (from both national and international sources) in order to assess the maintenance, updating and renewal of its programmes.
- c) Have mechanisms to regulate the decision-making process relative to degree programmes that are offered and the design of programmes and their goals.
- d) Ensure that the necessary mechanisms are developed to implement enhancements stemming from the periodic review of degree programmes.
- e) Determine the way (how, who, when) in which to be accountable to the stakeholders regarding compliance with the quality policy and fulfilment of the quality goals.
- f) Define the criteria for the eventual discontinuation of the programme.

3. The implementation of the programs towards a student-centered learning.

The HEI must have procedures in place to check that the fundamental purpose of its actions is to encourage learning in the students.

358. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidences to:

- a) Have information systems that enable it to know and assess the its' requirements concerning:
 - i. Definition of entry/graduation profiles
 - ii. Admission and registration
 - iii. Appeals, complaints and suggestions
 - iv. Student support and guidance for classroom activities
 - v. Teaching and assessment of learning
 - vi. Placement/work experience and student mobility
 - vii. Careers guidance
- b) Have mechanisms to obtain, assess and check information on the current development of the abovementioned processes.
- c) Establish mechanisms to regulate the guidelines that affect students: regulations (examinations, disciplinary measures, requests for certificates, qualification endorsement, etc.), rules of use (facilities), schedules, timetables and benefits offered by the university.
- d) Define how processes and actions associated with students are controlled, periodically reviewed and enhanced.
- e) Determine the procedures it uses to regulate and assure decision-making processes concerning students.
- f) Identify how stakeholders participate in the design and development of processes associated with student learning.
- g) State the procedure (how, who, when) used for the accountability of student learning outcomes.

4. Academic and administrative staff quality enhancement mechanisms.

The HEI/university must have mechanisms to ensure that the recruitment, management and training of its academic staff and service and administration staff are carried out with appropriate safeguards in order for them to adequately carry out their corresponding functions.

359. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidences to:

- a) Have procedures to gather and assess information on its academic staff requirements (job specifications, required competences, etc.), in accordance with its staff policy.
- b) Have the means to gather and analyse information relative to the abilities and current outcomes of academic staff, with a view to recruitment, training, performance evaluation, promotion and recognition.
- c) Define the approach to control, periodically review and continuously enhance its policy and actions associated with academic staff.
- d) Determine its procedures to regulate and assure decision-making processes associated with recruitment, evaluation, promotion, training and recognition.
- e) Identify the way in which stakeholders (especially teaching staff and auxiliary teaching staff) participate in defining and developing the staff policy.
- f) State the accountability procedure (how, who, when) concerning the outcomes of its staff policy.

5. Quality enhancement of material resources and services

The HEI/university must have mechanisms whereby it can design, manage and improve its services and physical resources³⁰ so that student learning can develop and take place in an appropriate way.

360. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidences to:

- a) Have mechanisms to obtain and assess information on the requisites for the design, allocation, maintenance and management of physical resources and services (including aspects associated with safety and the environment).
- b) Have procedures that provide information on its systems to maintain, manage and adapt physical resources and services.
- c) Define the system used to control, periodically review and continuously improve its policy and actions concerning administration and services staff.
- d) Define how the control, periodic review and enhancement of physical resources and services is carried out.
- e) Determine its procedures to regulate and assure the decision-making processes associated with physical resources and services.
- f) Establish the procedures to channel the different ways that stakeholders participate in the management of physical resources and the provision of services.
- g) State the accountability procedure (how, who, when) for adapting physical resources and services to the learning of students and their level of use.

6. The implementation of the research domain.

The HEI must have mechanisms to ensure and promote the development of research activities according to the programmes delivered by the institution and the social context where it is related to.

361. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidences of the following points to identify:

³⁰ Facilities (classrooms, study rooms, computer rooms, laboratories, meeting rooms, library seating), equipment, and scientific, technical, medical care, and artistic material.

- a) The body (in terms of structure, functions and decision-making process) within the institution responsible for establishing the policy, objectives and research trends
- b) The stakeholders involved and the mechanisms in place to take part in the definition of the policy, objectives and research trends
- c) How the research trends and the policy for developing research projects are approved
- d) How the implementation of the research projects (logistics, human, material and financial resources) resources is ensured
- e) How the research projects are evaluated.
- f) How the research outcomes are protected
- g) How the obtained outcomes are published
- h) How the improvements derived from the review of the policy, objectives and research trends are reviewed

7. Community engagement and social outreach.

The HEI must put in place mechanisms that ensure the development and improvement of actions towards the community and social engagement relevant to the requirements of society.

362. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidences of the following points to identify:

- a) The body (in terms of structure, functions and decision-making process) within the institution responsible for establishing the policy, objectives and actions derived from its community engagement and social outreach
- b) The stakeholders involved and the mechanisms in place to take part in the definition of the policy and objectives derived from its community engagement and social outreach
- c) How the community engagement and social outreach initiatives are approved
- d) How the implementation of the community engagement and social outreach projects (logistics, human, material and financial resources) resources is ensured
- e) How the actions derived from the community engagement and social outreach program are disseminated and communicated among the university and its stakeholders
- f) How the improvements derived from the review of the policy and objectives of the community engagement and social outreach are implemented.

8. Data management and its impact on the decision-making processes.

The HEI/university must be provided with procedures to ensure that outcomes (teaching and learning processes, graduate employability and the satisfaction of the different stakeholders) are measured, analysed and used³¹ for decision-making and to enhance the quality of degree programmes.

363. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidences to:

- a) Have mechanisms to obtain information on the needs and expectations of the different stakeholders in relation to the quality of the programmes.
- b) Have systems to gather information to provide data on learning outcomes, graduate employability and the satisfaction of stakeholders.
- c) Define how the control, periodic review and continuous enhancement of outcomes and data reliability is carried out.
- d) Determine the strategies and approach for enhancing the outcomes.
- e) Determine the various procedures to regulate and assure outcomes-based decision-making processes.

³¹ Outcomes should be divided up according to the different types of student, e.g. full-time, part-time, distance-learning, over 25s, second degrees, did not sit exams, etc.

- f) Identify how stakeholders are involved in the measurement, analysis and enhancement of outcomes.
- g) State the accountability procedure (how, who, when) for outcomes (activities reports, outcome reports, etc.).

9. Public information and transparency of the HEI.

The HEI must have mechanisms to ensure that updated information on degrees and programmes is published periodically.

364. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidences to:

- a) Have mechanisms to obtain information on the running of degrees and programmes.
- b) Determine the established procedure for informing stakeholders (including the different levels of the HEI's organisational structure) about:
 - i. The programmes it offers
 - ii. Goals and planning of degrees.
 - iii. Student admission and guidance policies.
 - iv. Teaching, learning and assessment and evaluation methodologies (including work experience).
 - v. Mobility.
 - vi. Pleas, complaints and suggestions.
 - vii. Recruitment, evaluation, promotion and recognition of academic staff and administration and services staff.
 - viii. Services and the use of physical resources.
 - ix. Teaching outcomes (in terms of learning, graduate employment/labour market outcomes and the satisfaction of the different stakeholders).
- c) Define how the control, periodic review and continuous enhancement of public information provided to stakeholders is carried out.
- d) Determine the procedures for regulating and guaranteeing decision-making processes associated with the publishing of information on the programmes and degrees offered by the HEI.

Part IX - Putting the Internal Quality Assurance System at the center of the new paradigm

365. The development of the Audit program, which supports institutions to design an internal quality assurance system that certifies its design first and then its implementation, has contributed to generalize this tool of self-control and co-responsibility of institutions and to deepen the generation of a culture of internal quality in the system; and the focus on the center³² makes it possible to define a minimum evaluation unit that gives coherence to the focus on learning outcomes since it allows for the establishment of context "readings" within the faculty, making visible the common structural elements of the center that all share, and reducing the evaluative weight in order to dedicate more effort to the part of results and their achievement, without having to fix the focus on the institution as a whole, whose dimension in some cases impedes a more detailed analysis.

366. As it has been mentioned before, the process of constructing a methodological reference for the quality assurance of education in Romania must be done on the basis of the processes learned and implemented in the recent history of the country.

³² By "center" in a Higher Education Institution is meant a faculty or a school, as the minimum unit which autonomously develops its IQA management in coordination with the central body in charge at the institutional level.

367. The definition in broad strokes of a quality assurance model articulated with a proposal of institutional accreditation criteria with a focus on careers, through measurements of indirect learning outcomes, structured on the basis of an internal quality assurance system of the institution, can be established in a top-down process of design and management given the development of the model and the existence of international reports that examine and analyze the system as a whole and propose reforms to it.

368. However, moving to a second level of concretization in the form of indicators and standards requires a process of consultation with the agents involved (especially the representatives of the institutions) in a clearly bottom-up approach that allows ownership of the model by its direct protagonists and contributes to giving legitimacy to the process based on the co-responsible participation of the agents.

369. This does not imply that the form of the consultation processes, the number of agents convened, the frequency of meetings and the agenda of the process are not led by the same authority in charge of the reform process.

370. Indicators and standards are reference points closely associated with the specificity of a specific academic tradition and should be defined and delimited through a process of consultation and discussion.

371. The mere idea that they can be defined based exclusively on the comparability of criteria and benchmarks from bodies outside the system would undermine the effectiveness of the exercise and legitimacy of the process.

372. Each higher education institution should have an internal quality assurance unit to ensure that internal procedures for the continuous improvement of the quality of the education provided are defined and periodically verified. The institutional accreditation process is oriented, to a large extent, to verifying that these units exist and fulfill their mission in an adequate manner.

373. The major purpose of the new model is to strengthen internal quality assurance processes in HEIs and to guarantee the existence of strategies, procedures and culture for quality improvement and assurance.

374. These evaluations are done on a recurrent basis, within the periods defined by the level obtained in the accreditation. This evaluation is cumulative with respect to the accreditation of new institutions. The evaluation criteria include the threshold indicators foreseen for the initial accreditation, as well as additional indicators (preferably process and outcome) covering new facets.

Chapter 7 - The Experts Handbook

7.1. The Experts Committee:

Composition of the Experts Committee (current)

375. For each institution evaluation, the composition of the Committee is as follows:

- The Mission director (Member of ARACIS Council)
- Mission coordinator (member of the ARACI Institutional Commission for Managerial and Financial Activities)
- 2 student evaluators
- Foreign evaluators (member of the National Register of ARACIS International Evaluators);
- Institutional Commission evaluator (member of the Institutional Commission for Managerial and Financial Activities) ;
- Programme evaluators (members of the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators (NRE) in each of the subject domain to which the evaluated programme are assigned);
- Technical Secretary (a member of ARACIS professional staff)
- **Suggestions:**
 - A labour market expert in the field of interest.
 - A chairman who might not be the ARACI Council.
 - A senior administrative staff (e.g. SG of a University).

376. The expert is appointed for each mission by ARACIS Council. The appointment becomes effective upon receipt by the services of the ARACIS of the letter of acceptance of the expert mission duly signed by the expert. Signing the Code of ethics and Rules of conduct is mandatory.

377. Nominations are welcomed from institutions across Romania. Student experts may be nominated by student representative bodies or Romanian higher education institutions. International experts are selected on the basis of nominations from the Romanian higher education institutions and from ARACIS contacts with relevant institutions and agencies in other countries. Training offered by ARACIS to Experts is mandatory.

Profiles of the Experts Committee members (suggested) ³³

378. The chairman of the Experts Committee is appointed from among the experts by ARACIS. The chairman's appointment becomes effective upon receipt by ARACIS of the letter of acceptance of the mission duly signed by him.

Qualities required in all experts including chairman:

379. All experts are expected to demonstrate the ability to:

- A range of perspectives;
- Relate to a range of individuals, including students and senior managers;

³³ Adapted from ELIR-QAA documents, 2018. The ELIR Handbook (fourth edition) sets out the review method that will be applied to Scottish higher education institutions in the period 2017-22.

- Lead discussions about strategic and operational approaches to the management of quality and academic standards in general, and the enhancement of the student learning experience in particular;
- Assimilate a large amount of disparate information and analyse it to form reliable, evidence-based conclusions;
- Communicate clearly, orally and in writing;
- Work productively and cooperatively in teams delivering to tight deadlines maintain the confidentiality of sensitive matters.

Additional qualities required in Romanian academic experts:

380. In addition to the qualities required in all experts, Romanian academic experts are expected to demonstrate the following qualities:

- Romanian experts are expected to have current or recent (within three years) wide experience of academic management at the institutional level in Romania, preferably relating to quality assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience;
- Consideration will also be given to candidates with substantial experience of working in a senior capacity in a professional support service within a higher education provider. Individuals with at least five years' experience of working in a role that gives them an institution-wide perspective;
- Personal and professional credibility with staff, including senior managers, heads of institutions, and staff currently engaged in learning and teaching;
- Knowledge and understanding of the on-going Romanian legislation on higher education and ARACIS regulations and ways of operating, as well as the Romanian National Qualification Framework (ROQF).
- Knowledge and understanding of the dimensions of the European higher education area as well as developments in quality assurance in distance learning, life long-learning and joint programmes.

Additional qualities required in international experts:

381. In addition to the qualities required in all experts, international experts are expected to demonstrate a number of the following attributes:

- Current or recent (within three years) wide experience of academic management at the institutional level outside Romania, preferably relating to quality assurance and enhancement of the student learning experience;
- Current or recent (within three years) experience of external review of higher education institutions outside Romania, either as a panel member or through senior involvement with a quality assurance or enhancement organisation;
- Peer-acknowledged expertise in the development of good practice in learning and teaching, and the wider student experience (it will be highly desirable to have such recognition at an international level);
- Knowledge and experience of practice in a minimum of one country in addition to Romania (it will be highly desirable to have wide-ranging international comparative knowledge and experience);
- Awareness of the distinctive features of Romanian higher education system within the European higher education area.

Additional qualities required in student experts

382. ARACIS actively encourages applications from students from all backgrounds and with experience of a wide variety of study modes and levels. In addition to the qualities required in all experts, student experts are expected to demonstrate:

- Current or recent (within three years) experience of study at a Romanian higher education institution, equivalent to a minimum of one year's full-time education;
- Experience of representing students' interests at institutional (including faculty or school) level;
- General awareness of the diversity of the Romanian higher education sector beyond their 'home' institution, and awareness of the arrangements for quality assurance in Romania.

The experts' roles

- The expert takes note of all the documentation provided by ARACIS.
- The expert participates in the investigations for the expertise of institutions, research entities and Doctoral schools. The expert can require, for the necessity of evaluation, any document from the institution.
- The expert participates in all the preparatory meetings and restitution specified in the mail order worth mission.
- The expert writes a contribution to the Experts Committee global report. This contribution is strictly confidential. It is registered in the application of electronic management of documents.
- The expert participates in a presential or distance training/information session with ARACIS.

The chairman's role

383. The chairman, like any Expert participates in the evaluation. In addition:

- Leads and coordinates the work of the committee;
- Ensures that the expertise is conducted in accordance with the present Framework for institutional evaluation;
- Prepares a draft evaluation report, from oral and written contributions of the experts.

Ethics and confidentiality

384. The expert must carry out an impartial, objective and independent expertise in accordance with the ARACIS Code of Ethics and Rules of conduct.

385. The experts and chairman undertake to strictly respect the rules of confidentiality and professional secrecy and expected to:

- Prevent from reporting any information related to an assessment;
- Only use the news that is transmitted in the framework and for the needs of the expertise mission;
- Report to the ARACIS at its designation as an expert, any element of made In accordance with the principle of transparency, the expert and chairman have accepted that her/his curriculum vitae is on the website of ARACIS. S/he has access to personal data in the respect of the regulation in force.

386. Confidentiality plays a fundamental role in the proper conduct of accreditation and must therefore be taken seriously by any member of the Experts Committee. Experts should pay attention to the status of information they are entitled to scrutinize and collect. This includes the documents

provided by ARACIS, as well as those provided by the institution visited, including self-assessment reports and analytical tools, discussions with persons met during the visit, its conclusions and opinions, the draft report of the Experts Committee and any other communication with it. Experts should also refrain from contacting the institution directly before and after the visit to discuss evaluation issues.

387. Complementary to the Code, the Annex presents a **Charter of the evaluation** for inspiration. The Charter sets the rules of each entity (Institutions, the QA Agency) and sets their rights and duties.

Compensation

388. The experts are compensated for their work at a rate of XXX RON per evaluation. This work includes :

- Preparation of the visit (analysis of the accreditation request, this phase does not give rise to any written report from the experts);
- Participation in the on-site visit;
- Participation in the drafting of the report.

389. Transport costs are reimbursed upon presentation of supporting documents. ARACIS covers accommodation, meals and possible transport in Romania. The language of documentation, work and writing is in principle Romanian or English upon request.

7.2. The site visit

The general principles of the site visit

390. ARACIS is responsible for promoting the methodological and ethical principles requested in the context of evaluations in the European education area. In this respect, the preparation of an accreditation visit must take into account the challenges of an external evaluation, which are explained in more detail in the ESG.

391. Among them, the main challenge is above all the continuous improvement of the quality of higher education. The evaluator must therefore be able to make proposals in this respect.

392. The expert's experience is essential to enable the evaluated institution to improve its training proposal, thanks to the conclusions of the evaluation.

393. External evaluation must be transparent in its operating rules and encourage dialogue and the co-construction of quality assurance mechanisms within the institution to be evaluated.

394. The implication of the experts is essential for the success of the external visit, in that each member present during the visit has different qualifications and knowledge, which are equally important for the drafting of the final report.

395. By being respectful of the other members of the Experts Committee, and of all the people met during the visit, the expert mobilises his skills to their full potential to fulfil his responsibility, and thus contribute fully to the success of the mission.

The analysis of background documents and self-evaluation report

396. The institution prepares its application for accreditation by conducting its self-assessment. This self-assessment should involve academics and those responsible for training and delivery, the school authorities, as well as students and former students of the programme and employer representatives. All experts receive the self-evaluation file and annexes before the start of the external evaluation visits. Sufficient time allows the expert to review all the information before the visit.

397. The experts are then invited to formulate a first analysis based on the self-assessment file and note the questions they will want to ask during the interviews during the visit. This first analysis concerns in particular the following points:

- The way in which the school meets the initial accreditation criteria relating to the opportunity of the programme, the quality of implementation with the involvement of employers, the robustness of student assessment;
- The ability of the institution to ensure the relevance of the training during the period of validity of the accreditation;
- Strengths and weaknesses of the training.

It is particularly important to be familiar with the ESGs, which are attached to this guide. According to ENQA³⁴, the very principle of the ESG is to assist the institution in preparing its self-evaluation report, and the expert in conducting the external evaluation.

Expected attitudes and posture during the visit

398. During all stages of the procedure, the experts must develop a reflective approach that starts from an **observation** (description of what is) to initiate an **analysis** (on the causes and implications of the functioning of the training programme) and reach **relevant recommendations**.

399. Similarly, the expert is a *critical friend*³⁵, who must be benevolent, encouraging and attentive, while offering the institution a frank, honest and constructive point of view. This posture is necessary because it is both analytical and non-judgmental, and it is also the most likely to bring about improvements.

400. By virtue of their knowledge of the training evaluated (acquired through their experience and their analysis of the self-evaluation file), experts have a fundamental role to play during the visit. They must be able to:

- Endorse an external look at the analysis and conclusions of the self-evaluation file;
- Certify the correlation between the description contained in the file and the findings made during the visit, in situ;
- Analyse the adequacy of the resources described in the file with respect to the training needs;
- Estimate the feasibility of achieving the objectives described in the self-assessment file;
- Provide an opinion on the relevance and feasibility of the actions included in the self-assessment file to improve quality;
- Make any useful recommendations to improve the quality of training.

401. On this last point, the role of the expert is decisive in the context of the external evaluation, since the report serves as a basis for the school's actions and frames its projects.

402. To ensure the fulfilment of the mission and to encourage a real commitment on the part of the institution in the evaluation process, the expert should endorse a methodological approach and attitudes based on essential values: the experts must be objective, confidential and involved.³⁶

403. During the visit, the experts shall collect, evaluate and communicate information relating to the activity or process under examination with rigour and relevance. This will ensure that each final recommendation is supported by evidence identified during the process (e.g. in the self-assessment report, documentation or interviews). The experts are **objective** in the sense that their comments are based on their knowledge and good practices in the areas of training.

The visit programme

404. The Experts Committee, in consultation with the institutions, defines the programme of visits. The visit usually lasts between half a day and a day per programme. The visit provides an opportunity

³⁴ *First external evaluations of quality assurance agencies – lessons learned, ENQA Workshop report 10, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2010)*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Recurring values in international guides for experts, such as Évaluation de l'efficacité des systèmes d'assurance qualité des collèges québécois, GUIDE DES EXPERTS, Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial (November 2015)*

to meet the institution's management team (director and his or her deputies), the curriculum group, students who are potential candidates for the assessed programme, and employers.

405. The visit provides an opportunity for the training programme actors to share their opinions and/or comments with the Experts Committee. The institution must be able to meet these different actors, visit the infrastructure used and have access to additional documents provided by the institution. The Experts Committee may request any additional documents it deems relevant before carrying out the visit. In this case, ARACIS shall inform the institution in advance as soon as possible.³⁷

406. More specifically, as part of the visit to Romania, the main steps will be as follows:

407. The visit is generally conducted over 3 days, including the following meetings with a selection of Faculties or Departments, Schools or domains (e.g. Science, Social Sciences, engineering, business school):

- The leadership and administration of the institution (Rector, deans, SG) (1 hour at the beginning and 1 hour at the end of the visit);
- Programme coordinators and curriculum group (1 hour in group);
- Senior heads (e.g. directors of administration like International office, HR...);
- Academics outside the curriculum group (1 hour in a group, per faculty/department);
- Students (1 hour in a group, per faculty);
- Internship supervisors or employers (in groups), across faculties/departments.

The interviews

408. The Experts Committee conducts the interviews. Depending on the topics to be covered, the interviews are divided according to the experts' qualifications, so that all areas of the evaluation are covered. However, each expert is not assigned to a specific category of questions or contact persons.

409. The limited duration of the interviews invites experts to ask short questions without accompanying comments. Experts are invited to formulate the questions, there is no particular format. The themes to be identified during the institution visit are as follows:

- The description of the context (in order to place the training in its specific, geographical and socio-economic context);
- Evidence, analyses and results;
- Conclusions;
- Elements of good practice applied by the institution;
- Recommendations for action to be taken.

7.3. Drafting the Expert Committee's report

Assignment for each expert

410. Each expert is responsible for writing a 5 to 10 page-report. This report is for internal use only, and is intended for the Experts Committee and ARACIS. Neither the institution nor the Ministry of higher education is aware of it.

411. The experts' reports serve as the base material for the institution-wide evaluation report. The Experts Committee's chairman shall ensure the consistency and final composition of the evaluation report to be submitted to the ARACIS Council and shall form the basis for the formulation of the accreditation notice for the Ministry.

412. The evaluation report is structured according to institutional evaluation quality standards (6 domains). A report template is annexed.

413. The content of the expert's report depends on the main theme addressed by the expert. The chairman of the Experts Committee is in charge of breaking down the main themes and allot the domains or quality standards to cover.

Tips to facilitate the drafting of the expert's reports

414. During the interviews, the experts take notes on an on-going basis. During the visit, the notes are taken to refine the analysis according to the criteria of the evaluation framework and to make specific recommendations for the institution.

415. For each quality standard, the expert identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed training programme.

416. The questions that experts can systematically address are:

- Is the expectation well handled by the institution in its self-assessment file?
- Is the evidence convincing?
- What other information should be requested during the visit?

417. Reports can be written in a concise manner, with an emphasis on analysis, not description. To build the evaluation report, ARACIS needs analytical elements and arguments. These are the result of the expert's reflection, analysis of the self-assessment file and interviews during the visit. There is no specific format for the writing.

418. The criteria contained in the evaluation framework under each reference, and used in the self-evaluation file, can guide the expert's analysis. Once drafted, the expert report is sent by email to ARACIS within 15 days following the visit.

419. ARACIS may approach the experts when drafting the evaluation report within one month of the visit. The evaluation report is sent to the school for verification of the factual data. The school has one week to send its comments to ARACIS. Following the institution's response, ARACIS may approach the experts again if necessary. Then, the final report is submitted to the ARACIS Council. Experts or chairman of the Experts Committee might be invited to present the report to ARACIS. The evaluation report is then sent to the Ministry with an opinion, conditions and any recommendations of the ARACIS Council.

Analytical grid for Experts Committees

420. The diversity of actors involved in the procedure, as well as the need for pre-visit information, requires evaluation mechanisms for two of the phases of the procedure. The following is a proposed model of evaluation during the visit of the members of the Experts Committee, based on the analysis of the self-evaluation file. This model can also be used before the visit to look into the self-evaluation report.

421. The purpose of this grid is:

- To help the experts, members of the Experts Committee, to conduct their own evaluation on the basis of the documents provided by the institution;
- To highlight the clarifications and aspects to be taken into account during the visit.

422. The structure of the model follows that of the institution self-assessment file. The expert is invited to use the assessment grids.

Strategy and governance				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution's vision and strategic plan are in alignment with its mission. 2. The institution has adequate policies, processes, procedures and instruments to realize its mission and implement its strategic plans. 3. Personnel and students and other stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the institution's strategy. 4. The institution contributes to the social, economic and cultural development of the territory on which it is located and at the national level. 5. There is a clear and transparent division of responsibilities, duties and authorities among the governing/leading authorities and decision making bodies, personnel (academic and non-academic staff) and according to the expected qualifications. 6. Students are involved in the administrative and decision-making processes and are incentivized to engage in the institution's strategy and management. 7. Institution pursues an open strategy of collaboration and partnership at a regional, national, European and international level. 				
Judgment of the expert of the Experts Committee	Not applicable	Insufficiently satisfied	Partially satisfactory	Completely satisfactory
Evidence collected in self-evaluation and during site visit for the criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX Lack of evidence for these criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX 				
Strengths and weaknesses per quality standards or per criteria where possible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +++ • ---- • +/- 				
Judgement of the expert: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the quality standards is fulfilled? • Against which criteria? • Which score would you assign? <i>Please check consistency of judgement at the end of the report drafting</i>				
Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per quality standards • Per criteria <i>Please check consistency of recommendations at the end of report drafting</i>				

Quality Management System				
<p>8. The quality management/assurance system is developed with clearly-defined structures, objectives, processes and procedures,</p> <p>9. The institution designs and implement policies with the objective of assuring, preserving and improving quality, especially for human resources, learning environment (infrastructures, equipment) and financial resources.</p>				
Judgment of the expert of the Experts Committee	Not applicable	Insufficiently satisfied	Partially satisfactory	Completely satisfactory
Evidence collected in self-evaluation and during site visit for the criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX Lack of evidence for these criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX 				
Strengths and weaknesses per quality standards or per criteria where possible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +++ • ----- 				
Judgement of the expert: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the quality standards is fulfilled? • Against which criteria? • Which score would you assign? 				
Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per quality standards • Per criteria 				

The Curriculum				
<p>10. The institution ensures that new and existing programmes reflect the needs of society and are continually adapted to societal development and the changing needs of the Romanian and regional, and international labour market as well as societal needs.</p> <p>11. The institution ensures that programmes have an appropriate level (short cycle/Ba/M/Doctorate, vocational, Life Long Learning), an academic content and an educational quality that supports students' learning and the achievement of programme objectives.</p> <p>12. The institution ensures its capacity to run the programmes efficiently regarding its human resources and learning environment).</p> <p>13. Clear goals and information are defined for each study programme and are communicated to students and stakeholders.</p>				
Judgment of the expert of the Experts Committee	Not applicable	Insufficiently satisfied	Partially satisfactory	Completely satisfactory
<p>Evidence collected in self-evaluation and during site visit for the criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX <p>Lack of evidence for these criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX 				
<p>Strengths and weaknesses per quality standards or per criteria where possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +++ • ----- • +/- 				
<p>Judgement of the expert:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the quality standards is fulfilled? • Against which criteria? • Which score would you assign? <p><i>Please check consistency of judgement at the end of the report drafting</i></p>				
<p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per quality standards • Per criteria <p><i>Please check consistency of recommendations at the end of report drafting</i></p>				

Teaching learning assessment				
<p>14. The curriculum design, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and review processes are in alignment with national requirements and the institution's vision and strategy.</p> <p>15. The institution has and uses mechanisms to ensure that outcomes (of learning, employment and the satisfaction of the different interest groups) can be measured, analysed and used for the enhancement of the quality of programmes</p> <p>16. The institution has mechanisms to ensure that the hiring, management and professional development of its teaching staff is carried out with the necessary guarantees to ensure they can fulfil the requirements according to their corresponding functions.</p> <p>17. The institution ensures the quality of exchange programs and international mobility (students, teachers, staff) and promotes mobility at all levels. Specific quality assurance mechanisms are in place for mobility.</p> <p>18. The institution complies with quality criteria specific to joint programmes.</p> <p>19. The institution offers opportunities for any student's educational and professional needs to pursue, stop and resume the study programmes.</p> <p>20. The institution has a clear policy regarding the assessment of student's achievements (academic and work placement and other learning outcomes a gained through the study programmes) as well as the accumulation and transfer of credits, so that the assessment is fair, equitable, understood by the students and in line with the pedagogical approach of the institution.</p> <p>21. The institution brings to the forefront and supports projects of pedagogical innovation and excellence in order to improve the integration of graduates and to strengthen the capacity for innovation by setting up innovative and employable courses.</p>				
Judgment of the expert of the Experts Committee	Not applicable	Insufficiently satisfied	Partially satisfactory	Completely satisfactory
<p>Evidence collected in self-evaluation and during site visit for the criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX <p>Lack of evidence for these criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX 				
<p>Strengths and weaknesses per quality standards or per criteria where possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +++ • ---- • +/- 				

Judgement of the expert:

- Do you think the quality standards is fulfilled?
- Against which criteria?
- Which score would you assign?

Please check consistency of judgement at the end of the report drafting

Recommendations

- Per quality standards
- Per criteria

Please check consistency of recommendations at the end of report drafting

Research support				
22. The institution ensures that the research projects contributes to and guarantee a high level of scientific quality in a relevant research area. 23. The institution ensures the dynamism of national and international development of its research policy as well as the valorisation and dissemination of its results. 24. There is an institutional strategy and programming of research activities 25. The institution promotes research and scientific activity in programmes teaching where relevant. 26. The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivise, assess and reward research engagement. 27. The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivise, assess, reward research engagement and foster the production and valorisation of research. The institution brings to the forefront and supports projects of pedagogical innovation and excellence in order to improve the integration of graduates and to strengthen the capacity				
Judgment of the expert of the Experts Committee	Not applicable	Insufficiently satisfied	Partially satisfactory	Completely satisfactory
Evidence collected in self-evaluation and during site visit for the criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX Lack of evidence for these criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX 				
Strengths and weaknesses per quality standards or per criteria where possible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +++ • ---- • +/- 				
Judgement of the expert: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the quality standards is fulfilled? • Against which criteria? • Which score would you assign? <i>Please check consistency of judgement at the end of the report drafting</i>				
Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per quality standards • Per criteria <i>Please check consistency of recommendations at the end of report drafting</i>				

Students and their support				
28. Admission, progression requirements and student evaluation methods are clear, manageable and publicly made available. 29. Mechanisms for student support and advice are established for successful accomplishment, continuation of studies and career preparation/job placement-orientation. 30. The institution ensures inclusiveness of any kind of student admitted. 31. The institution has a supportive policy to extra-curriculum activities and rewards the engagement of students.				
Judgment of the expert of the Experts Committee	Not applicable	Insufficiently satisfied	Partially satisfactory	Completely satisfactory
Evidence collected in self-evaluation and during site visit for the criteria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX Lack of evidence for these criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XXX • XXX • XXX 				
Strengths and weaknesses per quality standards or per criteria where possible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +++ • ----- • +/- 				
Judgement of the expert: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the quality standards is fulfilled? • Against which criteria? • Which score would you assign? <i>Please check consistency of judgement at the end of the report drafting</i>				
Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per quality standards • Per criteria <i>Please check consistency of recommendations at the end of report drafting</i>				

Glossary

Term	Definition used
Education providing organization	Education providing organization: is an education institution or other legal entity, which, according to its statute, carries out higher education activities based on legally approved study programs. According to the legislation in force, an education providing organization undergoes the evaluation procedure, for the external evaluation of quality or, as the case may be, for obtaining the provisional authorization to operate or the accreditation of the study programs and/or its own accreditation as an education providing organization. As per the provisions of the GEO no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended, only higher education institutions that are authorized to operate provisionally or are accredited under art. 29, para. (4) letter. a) and b) and art. 35, para. (1) can use the name of university or other similar names; the accreditation of higher education institutions is conducted according to the law, approved by the Government, upon the initiative of the Ministry of National Education, based on the ARACIS advise as per art. 31, letter. g).
KPI	A KPI is a measurement, which evaluates how an institution implements its strategic vision. It measures suitable actions to reach the objectives. It estimates quality by some standard or rule.
Milestone	Interim objectives
Mission statement	Overriding purpose of the institution
Objectives	Statement of specific outcomes that are to be achieved by a specified time
Output	Amount of something achieved by the institution
Outcome	Amount of something achieved by the institution which allows to evaluate the effectiveness of measures taken in relation to the set objectives to be able to repeat or – if necessary – amend the processes or structures and systems
Provisional authorization to operate	<p>Provisional authorization to operate for study programs and/or institutions is the first stage of the accreditation procedure; it is the result of an external evaluation conducted by ARACIS, based on a self-evaluation report submitted by the applicant. The provisional authorization to operate is the document which confers the higher education institution or the education providing organization the right to carry out educational activities and organize, if necessary, admission examinations for a study program.</p> <p>The provisional authorization to operate for a study program is granted based on the advice of ARACIS or of another agency registered in EQAR and of the Ministry of National Education, through a Government Decision initiated by the Ministry of National Education, within maximum 90 calendar days from its submission. The provisional authorization to operate can be granted to a higher education provider, by Government Decision, at least six months before the beginning of a new academic year, if the education providing organization has initiated at least three study programs that have been submitted and received advise for provisional authorization to operate from ARACIS or from another agency registered in the EQAR and from the Ministry of National Education, except for higher education institutions that only provide theological higher education, which may receive provisional authorization to operate if they have initiated at least one study program that has been submitted and received advise for provisional authorization to operate from ARACIS and from the Ministry of National Education.</p>
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is a culture, shared, learned and expressed consciously or unconsciously by the members of the institution as a group through their set of values, guiding beliefs,

	<p>understandings, ways of thinking, assumptions, activities and practices: „The way we do things around here “(Bouer); i.e. what is taken for granted, the paradigm, not inherited</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is relative, i.e. in relation to expressed, known or taken for granted obligations and/or expectations as laws and/or regulations, standards, guidelines, goals or objectives, as facts and figures • Can be expressed as effectiveness measured by the degree to which it realises goals set by the institution itself and/or by its environment • Can be expressed as efficiency measured by the ratio of inputs to outputs • Can be assessed by internal and/or external experts • Becomes transparent and should be communicated to its stakeholders regularly
SMART	Objectives have to be formulated in a specific (unambiguous) – measurable (meaningful / motivational / manageable) – achievable (appropriate / agreed) – reasonable (realistic / relevant) – time-bound (timetabled) way
Strategy	Long-term direction and motivation of the institution
Structures	Give people formally defined roles, responsibilities and lines of reporting with regard to strategy
Study program	<p>A study program/specialization consists of all the activities of design, organization, management, and the process of teaching, learning and research carried out in a certain field, which lead to the obtaining of an academic qualification. Study programmes are differentiated by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) level of university diploma: licence (<i>1st Cycle</i>), master's (<i>2nd Cycle</i>), doctorate (<i>3rd Cycle</i>); b) form of education: full-time, part-time, distance learning; c) field of specialization of knowledge, as per the academic division of learning and with the professional division of labor; d) duration of studies, respectively the number of the ECTS transferable credits; e) language of teaching. <p>Study programs are differentiated by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) <i>curriculum</i>, which includes all disciplines that lead to an academic qualification, distributed by year of study, their weight being expressed in European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) study credits; b) <i>discipline/course program or syllabus</i> outlining: the teaching and learning themes and practices associated with teaching, learning and evaluation, as well as the recommended bibliography; c) <i>the organization of students and teaching staff</i> for the study program implementation period; d) the system of <i>academic quality assurance</i> for all activities required for carrying out the study program.
Systems	Support and control people as they carry out structurally defined roles and responsibilities
Vision statement / Goal	Preferred future situation

Annexes

I. Example of Evaluation Charter



EVALUATION CHARTER

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD ON
06 June 2016

Evaluations carried out by Hcéres are based on coordinated assessment of all missions entrusted to higher education and research institutions and research bodies. Hcéres takes account of the links between study programmes, research and governance, as they relate to the local, national and international environment. It carries out peer reviews.

Evaluations are accompanied by recommendations and are designed to serve the parties evaluated, with the objective of improving the quality of higher education and research and strengthening France's role and place in the worldwide increase in knowledge and in its transmission.

Hcéres exercises the powers entrusted to it by law with regard to national regulation of higher education and research. It applies the principles of quality assurance currently in force in the European Higher Education and Research Area.

In order to foster parity, Hcéres takes care to balance numbers of women and men serving on all its ruling bodies and committees, including panels of experts.

This charter lays down a set of general rules on how evaluations are to be carried out.

PRINCIPLES FOR AN EFFECTIVE PROCESS OF EVALUATION

1. THE NEED FOR COMPETENCE

Hcéres selects experts on the basis of their known competence in accordance with the evaluation missions entrusted to them.

The French and foreign experts selected by Hcéres are recognised for the quality of their work across diverse fields.

2. THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONALISM

Hcéres keeps a close watch on the consistency and reliability of evaluation procedures and results.

It has introduced permanent self-evaluation systems and a plan for continuous improvement of its practices that makes good use of feedback.

Every five years, it undergoes an external review of its work and operating methods.

3. THE NEED FOR PERIODIC EVALUATION

Periodic evaluation of institutions, research units and study programmes enables regular measurement of their progress.

THE PRINCIPLE OF IMPARTIAL EVALUATION

Hceres is required to conduct impartial evaluations.

4. THE NEED FOR EQUAL TREATMENT

Hceres guarantees equal treatment for all evaluated entities. It ensures that panels of experts carry out independent, collegial and impartial evaluations.

5. THE NEED FOR INDEPENDENCE

Hceres carries out evaluations independently of any external influence. In this regard, it takes all necessary measures to prevent conflicts of interests arising at whatever stage of the evaluation process. If a conflict of interest does come to light despite the precautions taken, corrective measures are implemented.

6. THE NEED FOR INTEGRITY ON THE PART OF EXPERTS

Experts are required to demonstrate maximum rigour. Their assessments must be based on analysis of the information collected and factual arguments. They undertake to have no personal contact with the evaluated entity throughout the duration of the mission and not to communicate the results of the evaluation to anyone before they are published by Hceres.

7. THE NEED FOR COLLEGIALLY

An evaluation is the result of cooperation between numbers of complementary experts meeting together as members of the panels set up by Hceres. It is in no way the expression of an individual opinion.

Chairs of panels of experts are responsible for ensuring the collegiality of work carried out and that account is taken of the diversity of assessments made by the experts involved. They sign the evaluation reports on behalf of all the experts.

THE PRINCIPLE OF RESPECT FOR INSTITUTIONS

8. THE NEED TO TAKE FULL ACCOUNT OF DIVERSITY

Hceres implements criteria and procedures adapted to the diversity of the bodies and study programmes it evaluates, with regard to their nature, missions, and disciplinary fields.

9. THE NEED FOR RESPECT OF AUTONOMY

In accordance with the autonomy of evaluated entities, Hceres establishes dialogue with them prior to evaluation in order to take into account their expectations.

10. THE NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLICITY

Hceres undertakes to advise evaluated entities fully on the objectives of evaluations, the conditions under which they are carried out, the composition of the panel of experts and the curricula vitae of its members. Prior to any evaluation, the experts approached declare any conflict of interest with the evaluated entity to Hceres.

Evaluation reports are communicated to evaluated institutions and their supervising authorities for comment. Reports and comments are then published. In accordance with French Decree no.2014-1365 pertaining to the organisation and operation of Hceres, "for research units, only a final summary of the evaluation presenting a synopsis of opinions and recommendations, shall be made public."

11. THE NEED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY

Hceres collaborators are bound by professional secrecy and committed to strict discretion with regard to information they may have gathered, and work carried out in the course of their missions.

They also undertake not to make any personal use of such data.

II. Template for Evaluation Report



**The Romanian Agency
for Quality Assurance in Higher Education**

Accreditation of the University of...

Final report | Date

Table of Contents

The accreditation procedure

1.1. Object of accreditation

1.1.1. The University of XXX

1.1.2. Accreditation procedure

1.2. Experts Commission

1.3. Reference documents

External evaluation

2.1. The self-evaluation report

2.2. The on-site visit

2.3. Fulfilment of the quality standards (6 domains)

2.4. Conclusions of the panel of experts

2.5. Conclusions of ARACIS

Evaluation of the Quality Standards

3.1. One by one, the quality standards are addressed

3.2. Overall assessment (1-2 p)

Annexes:

- Management response by university
- Calendar of site visit

1. The accreditation procedure

What is the process purpose and legal background?

1.1 Object of accreditation

1.1.1 The University of XXX

2- page presentation of:

- *The institution, its history;*
- *Programmes and research including key figures (students' enrolment, faculty, research activity, any other information to the understanding of the report);*
- *Previous evaluation/accreditation from ARACIS and other organizations.*

1.1.2 Accreditation procedure

Presentation of calendar from request to the date of the accreditation decision.

Presentation of the implementation of the process, limitations.

1.2 Experts Committee

- *Names, titles and brief presentation of current occupation.*
- *Chair is mentioned.*

1.3 Reference documents

- *E.g. self-evaluation report*
- *Experts reports, etc.*

2. External evaluation

2.1 The self-evaluation reports

Presentation of the implementation of the self-evaluation, focusing on the participatory approach, the validation process.

2.2 The on-site visit

Dates, organization, categories of informants met on site, specific visits (e.g. laboratory).

2.3 Fulfilment of the quality standards

A summary of the level of achievements of the quality standards, scoring and main recommendations.

2.4 Conclusions of the Experts Committee

2-page summary of the overall conclusions that led to the formulation of the scoring.

2.5 Conclusions of ARACIS

Present here the recommendations (operational and strategic) with a timeline.

Formulate conditions including deadlines for implementation, ensuring they can be followed-up on.

3. Evaluation of the Quality Standards

3.1 One by one, the quality standards are addressed within each of the 6 domains, for instance:

Strategy and governance:

The institution's vision and strategic plan are in alignment with its mission. The institution has adequate policies, processes, procedures and instruments to realize its mission and implement its strategic plans.

The Experts Committee assessment for each quality standard, should follow the following:

1. *Facts (what is the situation?)*
2. *Analysis (judgement based on a set of evidence, against the suggested criteria)*
3. *Conclusions: is the quality standard met?*
4. *Recommendations including follow-up plan for the institution.*

3.2 Overall assessment (1-2 p)

The Experts Committee overall assessment across all quality standards, to highlight the connections between quality standards and domains.

Annexes:

- Management response by university
- Calendar of site visit