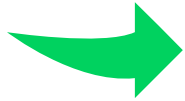


Internal quality assurance (IQA) Guidelines

Introduction



In line with European and global trends, Romanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) will 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.



- ✓ HEIs in Romania will be subject to a new regime of external quality assurance following the spirit of reform in 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.



This “national benchmark” for IQA management is defined by the requirements set up by the corresponding legal rules and the evaluation procedures implemented by ARACIS.

The 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, as part of the university’s own mission and vision and reflected in its governance strategy.

Objective of the QA Guidelines

- ✓ To provide HEIs with a general framework flexible to be adapted according to their diversity and individual nature
- ✓ To identify 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.



“mature IQA management”

This new approach means to share the responsibility of quality assurance with those HEIs with a mature IQA (a more institutionalized quality culture), without reducing the responsibility for both student protection and society safeguard, in terms of the quality of the graduated.



This approach allows the national QA body to focus on the outcomes of the IQA system rather than maintain the traditional comprehensive scrutiny.

The Purpose and Scope of the Guidelines

The Guidelines need to cover the following issues:

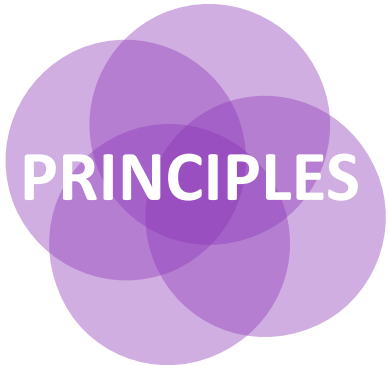


- ✓ the strengthening of the internal QA arrangements within a university concerning the roles and responsibilities of the institution as a whole
- ✓ the maintenance of strong internal QA arrangements within an university concerning the roles and responsibilities of the institution as a whole
- ✓ the 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 experience gained in Romania by ARACIS and the HEIs has clearly demonstrated 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 Romanian universities
- ✓ The Guidelines must also be related to the various external QA procedures that the Romanian universities must, and/or opt, to fulfil.

Principles



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 its 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.

Quality Assurance Guidelines



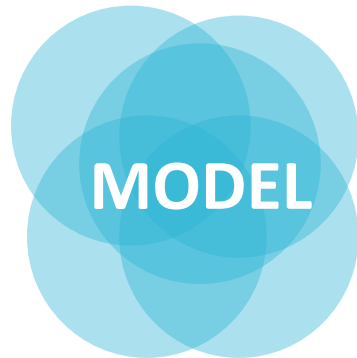
The proposed QA guidelines have been developed considering the following:

- ✓ Guidelines must be applicable within the different management models used with HE institutions
- ✓ Guidelines are developed within the framework of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education
- ✓ 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)
- ✓ 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.



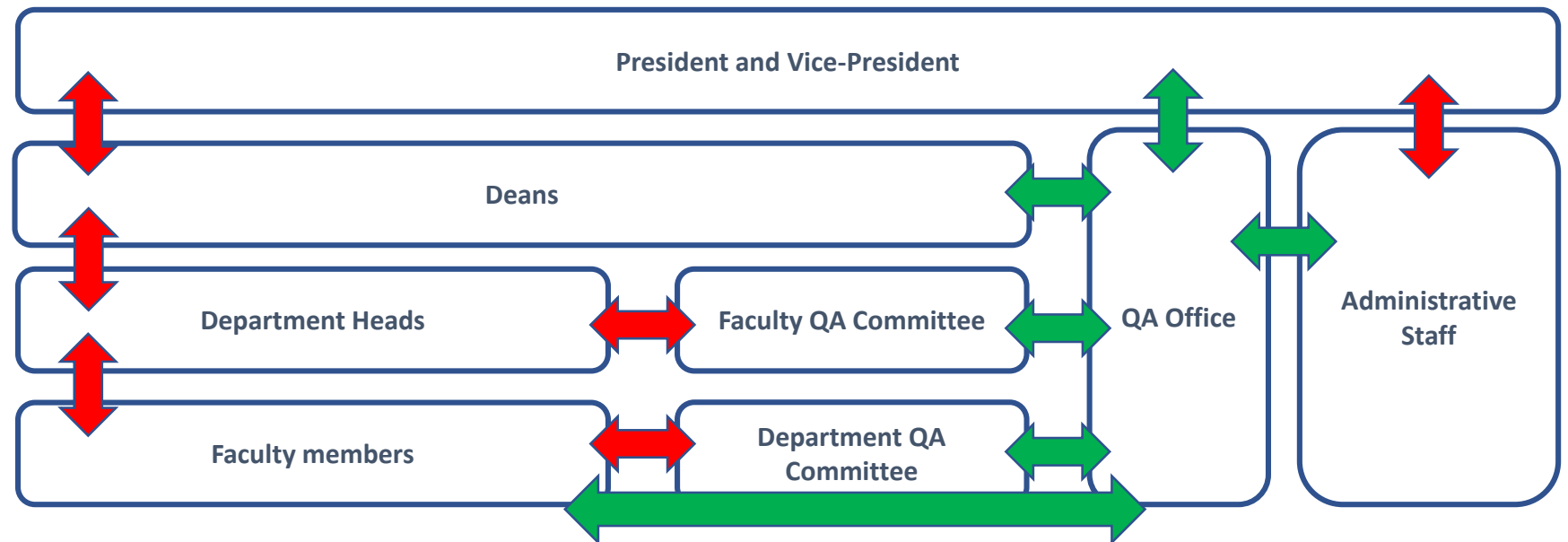
These Guidelines for IQA are designed to work aligned to the Romanian national requirements issued by ARACIS in charge of the accreditation at the institutional and program level, and help prepare universities for the external evaluations and the expectations of the public in general.

Suggested implementation methodology



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.



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).

Policy Proposal for the enhancement of quality assurance in Romanian HEIs



The 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.

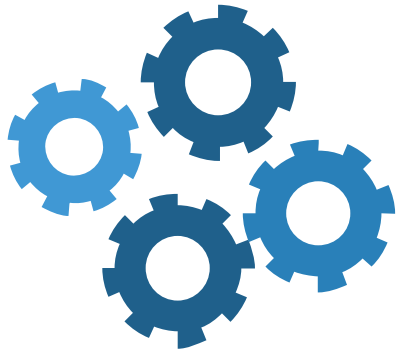
Structure of internal quality assurance systems

Aims and principles of action

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.

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.



Structure of internal quality assurance systems

Stakeholders

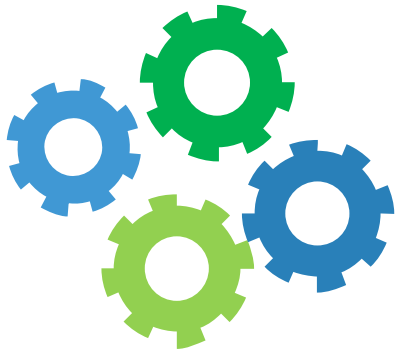
The HEI must state the stakeholders who are targeted by the system.

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.

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.



Stages

Structure of internal quality assurance systems

Scope

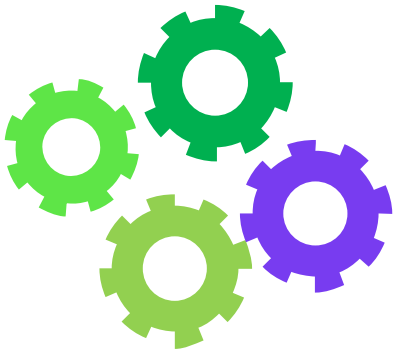
When defining internal quality assurance systems, the HEI must at least consider the **elements** that affect programmes of study:

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

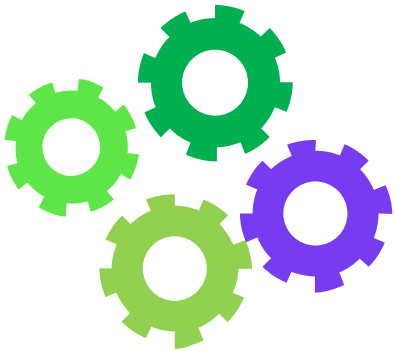
Classroom activities and student-orientated **actions**:

- ✓ 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



Structure of internal quality assurance systems

Scope (continued)



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

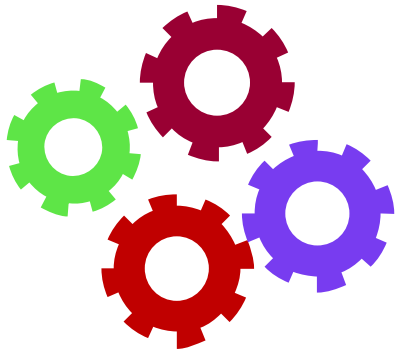
Public information:

- ✓ Dissemination of updated information on programmes.

Structure of internal quality assurance systems

Procedures

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.



Organisation, structure and resources

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

- ✓ 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.

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.

General guidelines for the Internal QA system procedure

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. Flexibility in the procedure should be a general principle for the current reform of QA of higher education in Romania.



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.



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.



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

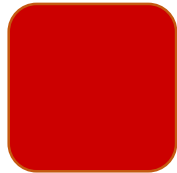
The HEI must have procedures in place to check that the fundamental purpose of its actions is to encourage learning in the students.

General guidelines for the Internal QA system procedure



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.



Quality enhancement of material resources and services.

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



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.

General guidelines for the Internal QA system procedure



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.



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 used for decision-making and to enhance the quality of degree programmes.



Public information and transparency of the HEI.

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

The Internal Quality Assurance System – at the centre of a new paradigm



The definition 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 analyse the system as a whole and propose reforms to it.



The major purpose of the new QA 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.**



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.