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Output 3.1.

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

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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, a 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.	The minimum acceptable level for achieving standards and performance indicators
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

Introduction

1. Rationale

1. This document presents recommendations to revise the methodology for Quality Assurance (QA) in the Higher Education (HE) in Romania. It has been prepared as part of the support services provided by the World Bank to the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency – ARACIS – to improve their current system.

2. The methodology proposed concerns the external evaluation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as well as of their study programs. In addition, the methodology includes: i) a handbook dedicated to external experts to be used in their external evaluation field visits; and ii) guidelines dedicated to HEIs to guide the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) process.

3. The current Romanian QA framework revision emerges from the changing environment in the HE sector in the recent years. From the mid-1990s to the late 2000s, the size of the HE sector increased significantly in the country, while the QA started to develop. Yet, since 2010, the number of students participating and attaining HE has decreased, Romania having the lowest percentage of the population with higher education among EU member states. Despite being on the last place, overall, Romania has progressed, improving the share of the population (30-34 old) with tertiary education 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 makes the sector more attractive and relevant. At the international level, following the approval of the European Standard and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in HE in 2005, and their adoption in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the landscape of QA in HE has been significantly reshaped – mainly, shifting its focus on the internal quality assurance, which resulted in reconsidering the entire external quality assurance process. In 2015, the ESG was reformulated to recalibrate the message towards student-centered learning and internal QA.

4. The proposal presented here thus takes into account the changes in the European and national HE sector using as a starting point the current legal framework for Higher Education and Research and QA in Romania. The revised version is built on the ARACIS's experience and all the methodologies, guidelines, and handbooks prepared accordingly since 2006. Other inputs considered for the development of this methodology are:

- i. QA related regulations and feedback received from ARACIS on the system improvement and change, including:
 - a. Suggestions provided by ARACIS based on their accumulated experience during meetings held between September 2018 through March 2019;
 - b. Recommendations provided by ENQA during 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.
- ii. Significant contributions provided by the ARACIS' experts and staff, as well as by student representatives collected during two pre-consultation workshops held in Bucharest on 21 and 22 February 2019 and during September-October 2019
- iii. Recommendations provided by the WB on the QA of doctoral schools.
- iv. International good practices extracted from the national QA frameworks such as those from AAQ (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).

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 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)¹: universities, academies of study, institutes, 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 like a continuation of the first two cycles, rather than individual research projects.

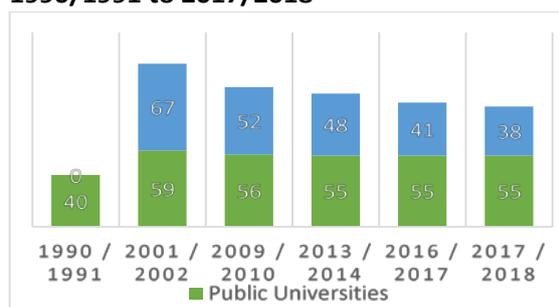
6. In the early 1990s, the Romanian HES expanded rapidly, and Romania tripled the number of tertiary education institutions, from 40 universities in the academic year 1990/1991 (only public entities) to 126 in 2001/2002, with 67 private entities (data are shown in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1). The number reduced to 93 universities in the academic year 2018/2019².

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 the higher education system had an intrinsic dynamic, covering only the need of graduates without linkages with the labor market. At the same time, without adequate internal quality assurance, the private university Spiru Haret entered a highly mediatic scandal, followed by the closure of the distance learning programs in some faculties. Consequently, the trust in private higher education has significantly decreased, affecting the number of students enrolled, which has 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 the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), 2019.

¹ National Education Law number 1/2011, article 114 paragraph 2

² Report on the Status of Higher Education in Romania 2017, Ministry of National Education.

8. The boom in student numbers happened when private HEIs started offering social and economic sciences programs, and they enrolled in large numbers, reaching 380,509 in 2007. In 2009, the growth rate in HE in Romania was the highest 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.³ Lately, the population has declined in the last decade, and that has also reduced 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 been reduced by half, from 907.353 in 2007 to 408.179 in 2017.

9. The increasing number of diplomas on the domestic market and a 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, work experience importance signaled the idea that the diploma is no longer a guarantee of a job and, even less, of a well-paid job. HE has contributed significantly to its regress. The focus on individual and institutional financial advantages has annulled any rational strategy, and the adverse effects shortly followed. When analyzing the learning opportunities for non-traditional students (old students), it appears they are fewer and less covered as shown by the data in Table 3, below.⁴

Table 3 - Number of students enrolled over the last decades

Bachelor students in public HEIs					
Year	full time	evening class	reduced frequency (part-time)	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	evening class	reduced frequency (part-time)	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 by the National Institute of Statistics, 2019.

10. The university enrollment declined over the last years, and engaging nontraditional students might be a way for universities to increase their success. Nontraditional students can be the older students, aged 24 and older, working full-time and who are financially independent. They can also be parents. Nontraditional students are seeking higher education studies to better prepare for a career. As the non-traditional student population grows, it is imperative for the academic staff to learn how to work with these students, to retain them in the system and to ensure their academic success. Romanian universities must adapt to these new challenges, as right now, only several Romanian universities have started offering a limited number of online courses so far.

³ 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

⁴ Idem.

11. Education has a key role in the Europe 2020 Strategy, It is not a statistical comparison, it is about generating knowledge, skills, employability, productivity, and ultimately well-being, which - by quality and competitiveness - is de facto integrated with the EHEA.⁵

12. 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 the higher education to the labor market needs⁶. The data presented in Table 4 below reflects that these measures are not completely implemented, and results are not yet achieved.

Table 4 - 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

13. In recent years, negative demographic trends have been observed in most age groups, in particular for 19-23 years old. At the same time, the number of students enrolled in the pre-university education decreased yearly. In the 2017-2018 academic 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 year⁷. The demographic trend is a major factor affecting the number of students enrolled in higher education. This evolution in the higher education population was also determined by other factors, such as: the decrease of the 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.⁸

14. 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 the member states have set national targets. The Government of Romania committed to reaching 26.7 percent by 2020. Romania has the lowest tertiary education attainment rate in Europe, 24.6 percent in 2018, according to the Eurostat data⁹. 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 reaching 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 (Table 5).

⁵ Idem.

⁶ The National Strategy for Tertiary Education 2015 – 2020 in Romania, GD 565/2015.

⁷ Report on the Status of Pre-university Education in Romania 2017-2018, Ministry of National Education.

⁸ 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.

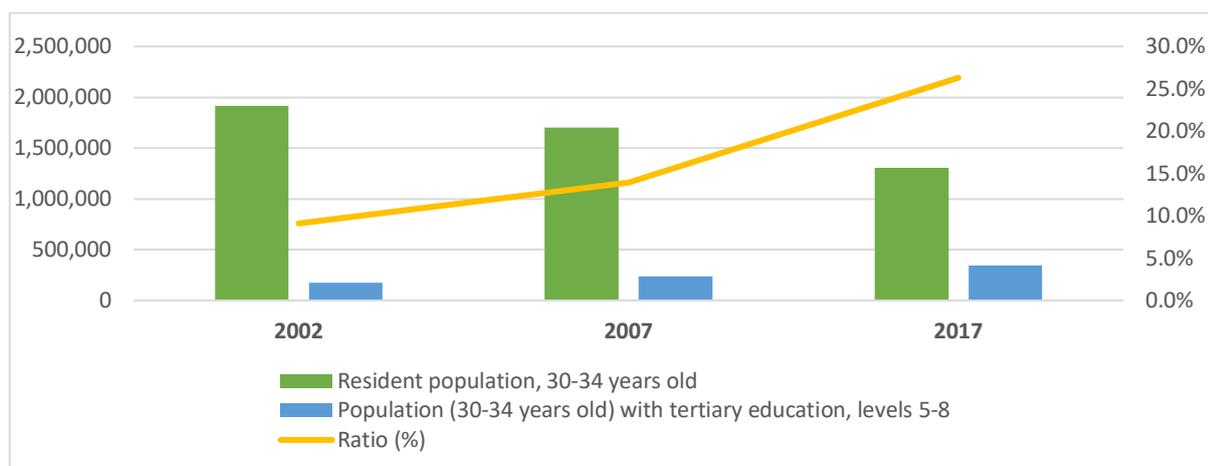
⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

Table 5 - 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
<i>Ratio (percentage)</i>	<i>9.1%</i>	<i>13.9%</i>	<i>26.3%</i>

Source: Eurostat, 2019.

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



15. However, the ratio above becomes significant if 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. Neighboring countries such as Croatia, Greece, Hungary, and Montenegro display a much better performance compared with Romania, as shown in Table 6 and Figure 3.¹⁰

Table 6 - Tertiary education attainment rate¹¹ in Romania and neighboring countries

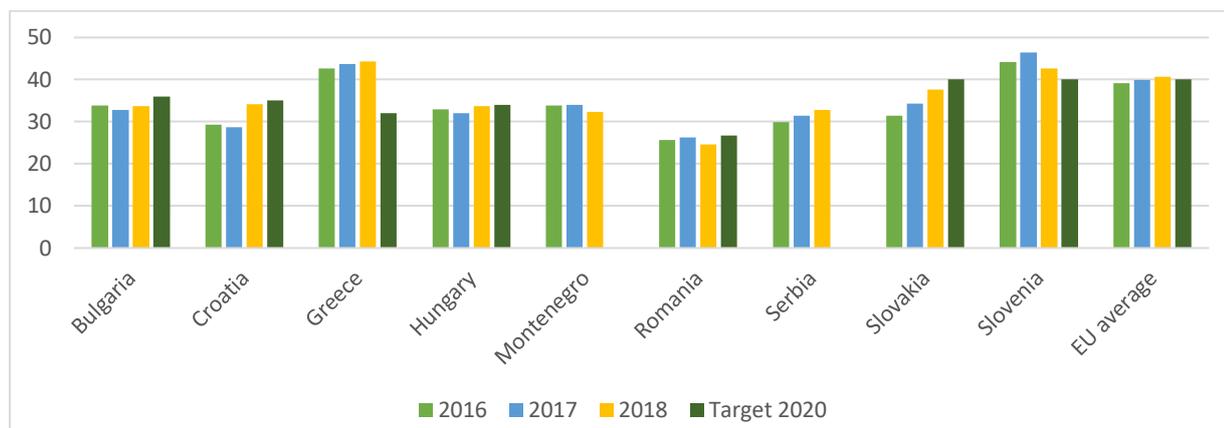
Country	2016	2017	2018	Target 2020	Country	2016	2017	2018	Target 2020
Bulgaria	33.8	32.8	33.7	36.0	<i>Romania</i>	<i>25.6</i>	<i>26.3</i>	<i>24.6</i>	<i>26.7</i>
Croatia	29.3	28.7	34.1	35.0	Serbia	29.9	31.4	32.8	:
Greece	42.7	43.7	44.3	32.0	Slovakia	31.5	34.3	37.7	40.0
Hungary	33.0	32.1	33.7	34.0	Slovenia	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

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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](#).

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

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



16. The 2019 Report of the European Commission¹² underlines that Romanian HE is not sufficiently aligned with the labor market. The number of graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics is low as a result of the low participation in higher education. Employers report that graduates entering the labor market have overly theoretical skills, and they often lack 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.¹³

17. 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. In the past years, unemployment among the most educated population, and the youngest rose.¹⁴

18. The economy's research and innovative capacity could be improved by increased science-business cooperation. HEIs do not have mechanisms to systematically integrate the 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 continuously needed.

19. Romania's demographic decline and aging 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).¹⁵

20. 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

¹² 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.

¹³ 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

¹⁴ Report on the Status of Higher Education in Romania 2016, Ministry of National Education.

¹⁵ Romania - Systematic Country Diagnostic, BACKGROUND NOTE, Migration, The World Bank, 2018.

educational offer and becoming proficient in a foreign language as the main reason for studying abroad. Internship and traineeship programs, job opportunities, and the proximity to their family are the most critical 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 vast majority preferred the opportunities available elsewhere. The message is consistent with the need to create local labor market incentives for lifelong learning.¹⁶ Romanian students' satisfaction rate was the lowest in Europe between 2016 and 2017, with only 39% of students being satisfied or very satisfied with teaching quality¹⁷.

21. Implementing measures to increase quality and participation in higher education, similar to those that have already been promoted by the 2015–2020 Strategy for Tertiary Education, address the challenges mentioned above. At the same time, excellence in higher education and research highly depends on QA in universities and their robust doctoral schools.¹⁸ The Table below is an HES data snapshot for the year 2018, that reflects the status and figures for HEIs, the field of studies, students, and academic staff calculated from the Eurostat data reported.

Table 7 - 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 enrolled in full-time, 8% in part-time (reduced frequency); 87% of students 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.

3. Current Romanian QA System

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

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report

¹⁸ Romania - Systematic Country Diagnostic, BACKGROUND NOTE, Education, The World Bank, 2018.

23. The Government, particularly the MoNE, has no direct institutional influence on the decisions made by ARACIS regarding its approach, the external evaluation of study programs, institutional QA, or the development of methodologies. The MoNE decides on accreditation only based on the advice and the recommendations provided by ARACIS, without being allowed to modify any proposed methodology unilaterally.

24. 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.

25. A Council of 21 members leads ARACIS— composed of 17 higher education teaching staff and representatives from student unions (2), employers (1), and university teacher union (1). Individuals who hold official positions within the Presidency, the Government, the Parliament, or Rectors, cannot serve as members of the ARACIS Council while employed in any of the roles above. 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.

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

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

28. ARACIS is conducting three main activities as follows:

1. *Program external evaluation/accreditation* (being in charge with temporary authorization of new program, analyze self-evaluation reports, formulate follow-up procedures, and conduct external evaluation),
2. *institutional external evaluation/accreditation* (initial assessment of the suitability of new HEIs and periodically review their accreditation status) and
3. *evaluation of master study domains*.¹⁹

29. According to the Romanian *Law no. 87/2006*, accreditation is a legal procedure that includes two key steps: provisional authorization and accreditation. When 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 the first step of provisional authorization, and then for the accreditation, after successfully operating the study program for several years. The accreditation of study programs at the bachelor level is performed in maximum two years from the graduation of the first cohort of students, while the accreditation of the institution can be undertaken after three study programs are accredited.

¹⁹ ARACIS Activity Report 2015 - <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publications/aracis-publications/>

30. ARACIS carried out around 2,400 external quality evaluations and 70 institutional evaluations between 2014 and 2017.²⁰ International evaluations conducted by the Institutional Evaluation Program (IEP), a QA 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 2014²¹. Firstly, their critical findings showed that reduced autonomy, constant legislative changes, and financial uncertainties are limiting the long-term strategic capacity of these institutions. Secondly, the national QA process and the complicated regulatory framework inhibit institutional innovation and diversity across the sector. Thirdly, the limited institutional cooperation, the high-quality variance, and the presence of too many small-sized universities fragment the HES in Romania.

31. Overall, Romania's HEIs improves quality by addressing the following challenges:

- Insufficient budgets for research and development
- Inadequate internal organization (highly bureaucratic and traditionally structured organization)
- Skills mismatch of graduates (weak match between HEIs offer 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 (aging of the teaching staff in Romania)
- Unattractive work sector for the new staff (low wages for entry-level, minor investment in human capital, limited growth opportunities)
- A significant gap in student enrolment for students from a low socioeconomic background (especially coming from rural areas)
- Out-dated teaching methods and course content, lack of flexibility in curriculum and teaching
- Reduced local and regional engagement with neighboring universities, private sector, civil society
- Limited responsiveness to current demographic changes.

4. A new QA framework in HE in Romania: maturity or change?

32. As well as other countries of the EHEA, the Romanian HES is currently experiencing a significant 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 technological revolution available to the average citizen– and (ii) the consequences derived from the maturity of the reform represented by the EHEA for the Romanian HE sector. Therefore, to best support the changes faced by the HE sector in the coming years, QA (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. An "academic contract" similar to Rousseau's "Social Contract" is an agreement between HE stakeholders on a new set of responsibilities and obligations. This new "academic contract" is a "new paradigm" underpinning a new approach and understanding of QA in HE at the 2030 horizon. The "new paradigm" may be just the normal evolution of the Bologna process or a real change that will be acknowledged, and therefore labeled, only after a new QA framework is implemented and some results achieved.

²⁰ ENQA Agency Review: Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), 2018 - <https://enqa.eu/index.php/external-review-report-of-aracis/>

²¹ Romania System Review Report

33. The alignment efforts of the Romanian HES with the Bologna commitments (mostly concerning the ECTS and the three-level structure of the HE qualifications) were followed by the first attempts to structure external QA practices. The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ESG) adopted at the Bergen Bologna Follow-up Ministerial Conference in 2005 in Norway followed the first evaluation attempts. The ESG became the primary tool guiding both HEIs and QA agencies in the EHEA. The young QA or accreditation agencies and bodies within the signing countries of the Bologna Declaration followed ESG in early years, and instructions derived from the Bologna's stakeholders meetings and working groups, as a formative element in the development of national agencies. The stakeholders' group consisted 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).

34. The approval of the ESG as the working tool to be used for both internal and external QA was a turning point for the QA organizations in EHEA. Since then, QA bodies have been applied for external periodical review of ENQA to acquire full membership in the Association, and consequently, be appreciated as a reliable QA system. The first external review of the Romanian HES conducted by the EUA took place between 2006 and 2007. Accordingly, ARACIS applied successfully for ENQA's first review in 2009. ARACIS renewed the membership after subsequent reviews in 2013 and 2018.

35. The first coordinated efforts to establish external QA practices in the EHEA, led by the European QA agencies, resulted in reports of the first round of external reviews coordinated by ENQA in 2007 and the set up of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) in 2008. Many countries in the EHEA started to rethink their QA framework focusing on institutional architecture and effective procedures. As a result, between 2012 and 2015, some European systems set up more coherent and efficient QA bodies. Moreover, these agencies shifted their strategies towards identifying the outcomes to be achieved instead of focusing intensively on inputs and processes. This improvement changed the landscape of the institutional arrangements and procedures in the QAS, establishing core principles of both internal and external QA of HE.

36. The shift to a new generation of "external QA bodies" in the EHEA follows different ways:

- merging of several organizations carrying out external evaluation of HE in a new QA body (such as Ireland's and Austria's case, where three bodies merged in a new agency)
- setting up a new agency emerged after a major restructuring (the nature, scope, and organization) of an existing QA body (such as the case of the Swiss OAQ to AAQ in January 2015, or of the French AERES in the current Héres in November 2014)
- Changing the legal status of an agency with a higher impact on responsibilities at the national level and less impact on the changing in accreditation policies and procedures (such as the case of ANECA in Spain shifting from a private national foundation to a public state agency in December 2015).

37. These are only relevant examples extracted from a wide range of changes occurring in the EHEA. Although these are changes at the organizational level of the QA bodies, they responded to internal and national challenges, and they were reflected by a substantial improvement in their processes, practices, and procedures. This transformation was revealed at the global level, improving the methodological view and the QA practices worldwide.

38. The methodological changes in EHEA derived from the 2009 review exercise that led to the strengthening of QA in HEIs and QA agencies. The different stakeholders involved in QA practices reflected on their external QA processes and the quality of HE and transformed into more mature systems, relevant for the national level as well as for the EHEA. The QA agencies developed procedures to accommodate the national legal framework and the ESGs procedures applied to European HEIs. The professionalization of the QA in HE through the use of external agencies strengthened the responsibility of the HEIs over the internal QA policies and processes.

39. QA agencies improved the transparency of the evaluation tools, processes, committees, and experts used, becoming on the one side, more accountable for results, and on the other hand, engaging early and transparently the manifold stakeholders of the HE sector (academic and administrative staff, students from universities and professional bodies, trade union representatives and employers). ARACIS has not been oblivious to these QA changes. The self-evaluation reports presented to the ENQA external review in 2009 and 2013, clearly show that the Agency played a vital role in the translation of the ESG to the national HES.

40. The European countries underwent structural changes in their QA systems at the national level between 2012 and 2015 –United Kingdom, Ireland, Austria, Denmark, France, and Spain. It 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 needed adaption to a new higher education in constant development. This experience led to a common understanding of a structural change: the external institutional and program evaluation adapts to a more matured QA system, through simplifying the existing cumbersome procedures for external QA. This new system demands:

- a risk-based approach distinguishing between different levels of attainment of quality compliance among HEIs at the national level
- strengthening the balance between the internal QA management and the systems of the HEIs and the external evaluation procedures of the QA bodies based on 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)
- a redefinition of the stakeholders' roles and involvement in QA practices

41. QA should not be considered only the responsibility of the external agency in charge; it should be at the core of the university, it should respond to the national QA regulations and, above all, to the internal QA self-requirements. The aim of QA should go beyond respecting the minimum quality standard established by the national compulsory system, contributing to the enhancement of the quality standard. 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 with improved QA practices. Therefore, these agencies reduced the external procedures to a set of minimum core standards and indicators to evaluate the HEIs and academic programs for adequate implementation, maintenance of regular procedures at institutional and programs level. The procedure refers only to the target not achieved, benchmarked with the national level. As such, the QA system sends a compelling message to the HE sector: it may self-regulate depending on the level of maturity and responsibility shared between the different actors involved. The minimum standard level (“threshold level”) required to all HEIs and programs is guaranteed by the QA system, at the national and international level. Thus, the minimum standard established by the system implies two tasks in the new contract between ARACIS and HEIs: (i) protecting students against inappropriate HE practices or HE providers and (ii) protecting society through guaranteeing a certain level of quality for the graduates established by the national HE system.

42. ARACIS will play a critical role in ensuring that the minimum standard concerning institutional or program quality within the framework of the ESG will be attained. The new approach on QA developed by ARACIS shows high respect for the diversity of HEIs and higher education stakeholders (public, private, regional-oriented, international-focused, fully on-line, blended, etc.). Each HEI will be evaluated individually based on its own QA record and progress shown during ARACIS’ external evaluations. This QA model also prevents the risk of defining a one-size-fits-all at the national level, giving room to HEIs to improve against their own and national benchmark. This shift towards a more

“balanced” and “autonomous” QA paradigm for the HEIs where they are evaluated according to their individual record and context within the national framework, will rely on a shared agreement with HEIs in the country: a strong QA management in place, with a set of criteria/guidelines for compliance, checked against HEI’s performance and evidence. A standard procedure is required to retrieve comparable and compatible data in order to feed the national data and the statistics systems. In addition to the quantitative indicators, the qualitative indicators promote and support institutional diversity.

43. Strengthening internal QA mechanisms at HEI level to create the right balance between internal and external QA, as well as to develop an internal quality culture to successfully respond to national QA legal requirements or accreditation awarded by other international organizations. The chapter dedicated to the IQA explains the potential that an institution may unlock through developing an internal culture of quality. This includes moving from a compliance-based approach to an innovative-based one driven by the governance and strategy of the university.

44. The change of paradigm in the HE system implies reforms with high political stakes. The Bologna process required at the time massive system reforms over a period of 10 years. Contexts and cultures of HE systems are significant in order to understand the way the Bologna tools have been adapted and implemented. A university is an almost “universal” cultural construct existing for centuries, worldwide. Nowadays, universities and the HE systems are closely interconnected, interdependent, and linked to the legal framework. For instance, a legal framework strongly based on written legitimate sources and subject to interpretations of judges will have a particular reflection on the implementation of the ECTS or the use of the ESG. A legal framework focused on conventional and customary law will have some flexibility in the application of the Bologna tools.

45. A new paradigm in QA of HE in Romania would take into account the national implementation of the Bologna process over 20 years, since 1999, and the progress reported, and the agreements reached by the Ministers during Ministerial meetings. Taking stock of the experiences acquired by the Romanian QA system in order to identify the current status of QA, it can be summarized below:

- ARACIS has a strong experience in the design and implementation of its own methodology through different procedures that are in place, at the program and the institutional level;
- ARACIS has a panel of senior evaluation experts to perform the different evaluations;
- ARACIS facilitates training for the experts to adapt to the Bologna process;
- ARACIS has the opportunity to reflect and debate on the Bologna process tools and mechanisms, during the implementation of the evaluation procedures
- ARACIS contributed to the dissemination of the vision and policy intent of the EHEA’s main stakeholders: EUA, ENQA, ESU, etc.
- ARACIS complied with the ESG in three successful external reviews coordinated by ENQA, discussing on the main 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.

46. HEIs contributed to the national QA system using their own resources and on their own initiative. The experience acquired by HEIs is summarized below:

- The HEIs management developed a strategy of QA to follow up on academic and research objectives;
- HEIs formalized internal QA systems to respond to management needs and external QA requirements;
- The academic staff of HEIs took part in the internal evaluation process, and external evaluation panels, contributing to the enhancement of QA policy at the institutional level. Embedding quality culture in regular activities focused QA on improvement rather than control;

- The structure of IQA institutionalizes QA within the university and identifies a clear counterpart for ARACIS ;
- HEIs involve students in the QA process to strengthen the awareness of students in the Bologna process and at the same time to empower them beyond the role of a “customer” of higher education.

47. An enhanced model is based on the experience acquired by the Romanian HEIs, ARACIS, and its evaluation experts since 2005 implementing QA and accreditation processes. The revised institutional accreditation approach is focused on outputs and avoid potential duplication of the procedures or program evaluation.

48. The development of a strong IQAS within the HEIs and certified through an external procedure creates a stronger autonomy to HEIs. This strengthening is positively impacted by the external evaluation procedures at the institutional and program level. The Romanian HEIs and their IQAS will be evaluated based on the maturity level reached. HEIs without a strong IQAS implemented will be analyzed by ARACIS based on risk and will give the recommendation to improve the internal QA management.

49. The purpose of this approach is to strengthen the IQA process and to provide coherence between internal strategy, management, organization, and culture. The accreditation report will conclude with a series of recommendations and an improvement plan for each institution, as agreed between ARACIS and HEI. This approach underpins a crucial understanding of QA Management for HE: IQA management has to be part of the strategic plan and decision-making process in each Romanian university. IQA management is linked to the institutional strategy embedded in the institutional processes and in the teaching practice, research, innovation, and internationalization policies. This paradigm affects the external QA, focusing on collaborative and risk-based approach at the institutional level, giving more autonomy and flexibility to the university for the internal QA arrangements and evaluation of the study programs keeping alignment with national and discipline-oriented requirements. The indicators will measure expectations against an agreed QA benchmark or target.

50. The development of an explicit Quality Culture within Romanian depends on the commitment of staff, students, and senior management. A bidirectional communication policy in universities requires a bottom-up flow for senior management and a top-down mechanism to expand the Quality culture, based on the following principles:

- the academic standards and teaching and learning process are at the core of this culture;
- QA is embedded in managerial, administrative and content activities;
- periodical review of IQA and use the outcomes to report on external QA process;
- collect and report the core data to provide evidence for QA decision making –shifting from ‘how well have we done?’ to “this shows how much we have improved.”

51. The process towards a Quality Culture is mainly based on what HEIs are currently doing and achieving, focusing on greater clarity and effectiveness. Staff will easily notice the benefits of their contributions, students and stakeholders will see their contributions to enhance the HEI’s reputation and additional gains. Quality may be integrated into activities, not only to meet the external demands but as a way of highlighting the internal individual and collective effort. Quality Culture outcomes should be transparent and displayed to the public audience by identifying the core elements and data that prove the progress achieved against targets and HEI’s mission. The emphasis shifts from “process” to “outcomes.” The relationships between management and staff is determined by the nature of the organization, and clear communication policy influences the relationship, remaining essential in reaching goals or celebrating success.

52. The Quality Management System provides by HEIs main activities, focus on:

- developing a Quality Culture in the provision of academic and support services;

- updating managerial documents that are easily readable and available;
- formalizing mechanisms for the approval, monitoring, and award of the programs;
- providing adequate learning resources for student support across programs;
- fostering research and innovation and nurturing intercultural engagement;
- promoting QA and enhancement at departmental and institutional levels;
- empowering staff in the implementation of QA system;
- undertaking IQA and regular EQA at least every two years (based on the review schedule and procedures defined and published, well in advance).
- participating in EQA reviews on a regular basis (based on the review schedules and procedures published).
- Supporting quality monitoring and enhancement following the 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;
- using data collection systems to provide relevant evidence for decision-makers;
- clarifying the confidentiality nature of documents and reports to publish the relevant ones.

53. This model refers to a QA architecture adapted to an HEI according to its own strategy and organization, deployed in three levels:

- Top-level management is in charge of *policy and decision making* for IQA;
- The middle management is the organizational structure supporting the IQAS: department, unit, office or bureau in charge with *implementing* the IQA;
- The entire institution uses a specific procedure for the periodic evaluation of the IQAS based on a Toolkit and guidelines for IQA developed by ARACIS .

54. This approach moves away from the previous paradigm of a “one size fits all” for external QA threshold or minimum compliance standard, allowing the agency to pay different attention to each particular university, sending a clear message of an external QA mechanism institutional-targeted. Finally, this approach stems from the current debate on internal versus external QA practices, which is taking part at a global level, as shown by the latest agendas of the international QA networks worldwide.

5. The revised Methodology proposed for the external evaluation in Romania

55. The proposed Methodology for external evaluation is driven by the transformation of the Romanian higher education system and consists of the following main parts: i) external evaluation of institutions; ii) external evaluation of study programs; iii) internal quality assurance; iv) guidelines to conduct field visits.

56. The Methodology considers the following key levers: i) diversity and complexity of HEIs; ii) flexibility, multiplicity, and adaptability of study programs; iii) quality improvement focus and consistency of institutional and departmental quality requirements; and iv) Romania’s engagement in the EHEA and alignment to the ESG 2015. The work carried out for the preparation of the methodology concluded that: QA cannot be scaled from one context to another; legal frameworks are critical to the operational activities of a QA agency; collaboration with universities and student organizations is key in the context of building trust, and HEIs are the primary responsible for QA.

57. Diversity and complexity of HEIs. Diversity results from the changes in the institutional profile of traditional HEIs, and from the local demands for comprehensive HEIs delivering programs in more than 3 fundamental fields, or for HEIs focused on a field or a limited number of fields. At the same time, the diversity results from the number of public (55) and private (38) HEIs but also from their missions and objectives. The diversity is respected and encouraged in the external evaluation process.

58. The increase in HEIs complexity and size, in terms of number of study programs and students, is accompanied by specific challenges, such as the transformation of HEIs, from elitist universities into mass HEIs; the strengthening of research performance requirements, while also strengthening the teaching quality requirements; recruitment of young researchers and teaching staff, due to the non-competitive salary package; variations in the attractiveness of study programs and financing from public or private funds; internationalization of higher education, increase the educational offer in foreign languages, student and research mobility in and out Romania as part of international research; adapting the objectives and outcomes of learning to the growing dynamics of labor market demands and correlating the learning outcomes with the employers' expectations.

59. Flexibility, multiplicity, and adaptability of study programs. Flexible organization and provision of multiple numbers of study programs adapted to the requirement of the labor market lead to "distributed learning." Such an organization is critical to attracting non-traditional students, essential in the current context of the student demographic decline. The variety of offers to deliver study programs, the teaching staff mobility, and the information technology use are pillars to HEI's organization of i) territorial branches and extensions; ii) distance learning , part-time and blended programs, and iii) partnership with employers for innovative solutions and research hubs.

60. Quality improvement focus and internal consistency of quality requirements. HEIs are the main responsible for quality assurance and enhancement. The continuity of the performance improvement is provided by the self-assessment process, the external evaluation providing only a reality check, a regular snapshot of activities, and students' perceptions. The quality culture expects that policies and mechanisms are in place to protect students, to support the academic and non-academic staff in their efforts to improve the quality of the programs and research, to provide a learning environment adequate to successful outcomes and development. The harmonization of central management with the management of faculties or departments creates difficulties in allocating resources to cover the institutional quality framework. Failure to provide institutional homogeneity may have repercussions on the institutional profile of quality.

61. Romania's engagement in the EHEA and alignment to the ESG 2015. The Romanian QA system fully complies with the requirements of the EHEA regarding QA, and notably with the European references – the Romanian HEIs are at the quality levels required and recommended, remaining competitive at European and international levels. As per the Communiqué adopted in the 2015 Yerevan Conference, the ESG are applicable to the entire higher education of the EHEA, irrespective of the place or the format for the provision of education services.

62. The proposed Methodology complies with the recommendations provided by ENQA and EQAR, following the review of ARACIS in 2018. The recommendations derived from ESG, being related to the quality of teaching and learning process in HE, including the learning environment, and interconnectivity with the research and innovation sector. This implies that institutions have policies and processes to achieve and improve their own activities, for example, the scientific research of teaching staff.

63. ARACIS focus on consultations with stakeholders and increased transparency. The approach, methodology, and practices on the ground followed by ARACIS are based on cooperation, trust in the relationships with HEIs and stakeholders. The stakeholders are part of the consultative process but also of decision making. The reports on the results of external evaluations are published by ARACIS and HEIs. The findings of the evaluation include recommendations and results that are published after the complaints resolution stage is completed, and they are communicated to the Ministry of National Education.

64. Focus on results. In QA and evaluation, the learning outcomes and the university research performance, seen as a component of the education process, are essential. 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 good practices and successful structures in the field of academic quality.

65. According to the legislation in force, the evaluation of quality has 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 the European level includes the listing of the national agencies for QA, ARACIS included, in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR. Moreover, the fact that Romanian HEIs are part of the EHEA 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/study program provider. From this perspective, QA 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 QA, as provided by the law, for drafting, monitoring and updating QA policies.

66. The proposed methodology is intended to be used mainly by ARACIS, technical staff, council, specialty commissions, and by HEIs for internal QA.

67. Beyond the formal processes for internal QA and external QA, there is a key factor identified in the extensive literature on QA that allows mature QA systems to operate reliably: building trust. In most contexts, when the outcomes of a process are mutually beneficial to stakeholders, trust is a prerequisite for ensuring that appropriate actions have been taken to determine the outcomes. 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 also once the outcomes are known to all stakeholders. Trust-based relations and the collaboration between the QA agency and HEIs would strengthen the higher education system and, ultimately, the HEIs.

68. The proposed audit procedure to be introduced as new legislation with the methodology aims to strengthen the internal QA and allows universities to accredit their own study programs. Romania has focused on external QA procedures, but according to the ESG, the primary responsibility for QA resides 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.

69. This methodology consists of a recommendation for program level:

- Authorization of the provisional functioning of the new Bachelor/Master degree programs initiated and proposed by the accredited HEIs;
- Periodical evaluation of Bachelor and Master programs.

70. The proposed methodology for programs applies to all fields of study or means of delivery (full-time learning, part-time learning, traditional, distance learning, e-learning programs), as well as joint/

double degree programs. 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 regulations²², 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.

²² Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 regarding the quality assurance of education, approved with amendments by Law no. 87/2006, as amended and supplemented.

Part 1. - Methodology for Institutional and Program Evaluation

1.1. Institutional Evaluation

71. According to Romanian *Law no. 87/2006*, accreditation is a legal procedure that includes two key steps: provisional authorization and accreditation. When 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 the 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; the accreditation of HEIs can be undertaken after the accreditation of three study programs.

72. *External evaluation for accreditation of HEIs.* 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's website. The review's conclusion is either "accreditation proposal" or "non-accreditation proposal," referring to an HEI's credibility to assure the quality of study programs and management activities. The HEI has the possibility of appeal against ARACIS's decision. The final decision is shared with the MoNE.

73. *Periodic external evaluations (periodic reviews) of accredited HEIs.* Accredited HEIs are subject to the periodic external evaluation of institutional QA mechanisms and compliance with the ESG at least every five years.

74. *External evaluation of accredited HEIs.* The experts' panel consists of 3-4 members that are national or international evaluators recorded in the National Register of Evaluators maintained by ARACIS, and as well as includes students. The HEI is informed by a comprehensive letter about the findings and preliminary conclusions of the report, with an option to respond. The visit report is sent to the Department of external QA evaluation from ARACIS for validation of the procedures and drafting a report. All the reports are presented to the ARACIS Council for their final decision. The final report with the proposal for accreditation or rejections submitted to MONE for endorsement. The final report, including the follow-up procedures, is published on the ARACIS' website. The decision is submitted to the HEI and the MoNE.

75. 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.

76. The current evaluation process consists of 4 steps:

STEP 1. The university prepares a *self-evaluation report*. The self-evaluation report consists of a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis, a description of the institution, and the internal quality assurance process. The report also includes supporting documents and data to provide the evidence for the report's assertions. The self-evaluation report is structured to respect the three main domains, the criteria, the standards, and the indicators as presented in the legal framework for QA. The revised methodology recommends to include in the report also the subdomain level. In chapter 6 of this document, a specific guide for Internal Quality Assurance

is attached.

STEP 2. ARACIS carries out 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 the compliance with the criteria and the quality standards. The Experts Committee is made-up of three-four evaluators, also including one or more students, for a duration of three-four days, so as to concretely assess the correspondence between the data, the information and the 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 finalized with a set of conclusions and recommendations. There are four reports that follow the self-evaluation report prepared by HEI: i) the visit report prepared by the Experts' Committee; ii) the report prepared by the Specialty Commission and the one prepared by the Permanent Specialty Commission; iii) the report of the ARACIS Council that endorses the previous reports. The present Framework for institutional evaluation includes the Experts Handbook (to be further developed).

STEP 3. *Scoring the level of fulfillment of quality standards* (to be further developed). In order to assess the level of fulfillment of quality standards, the Methodology includes a scoring grid, meant to assess the compliance with the quality standard, and the requirements to progress to the next level.

STEP 4. *Preparation and publication of the final report, including the follow-up procedure*. The final report includes a section on the accreditation decision, main findings, and recommendations. For example, in the case of temporary authorization and accreditation, the first decision is whether to grant the status. If the recommendations advise for a supplemental implementation period, an implementation plan is required to be prepared with specific provisions and deadlines. The evaluations awarded with the highest degree of confidence require the follow-up procedures after three years. In addition to the awarded degree of confidence or basic assessment, ARACIS identifies the institution's good practice and areas for improvement.

77. *Audit of accredited HEIs*. An audit procedure is proposed to be performed by ARACIS as an alternative to the periodic external institutional evaluation. The focus of the audit is on the internal quality assurance (IQA) processes of HEIs, assessing their functionality and effectiveness, but at the same time on quality enhancement of HEIs. This approach entails a shared responsibility of QA between ARACIS and HEIs: the agency accredits the HEIs, and, in turn, the institutions have self-accreditation authority for their own study programs.

1.2. Program Evaluation

78. *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 the site-visit results. The experts' panel presents the site-visit results to the permanent specialty commission²³ for the respective study domain. The role of the commission is particularly important in ensuring compliance with the regulations and the consistency of decisions. The report is submitted to the Accreditation Department for the validation of procedures, and then to the ARACIS' Council. The Council verifies the report and the procedures and

²³ 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 reduced frequency programmes; institutional evaluation for management and financial activities; and the employers registry.

takes the final decision on the accreditation of the 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), in order to prepare the Government Decision on the accreditation of the study program.

79. *External evaluation of accredited study programs.* Accredited study programs are subject to periodic external evaluations of institutional QA mechanisms and compliance with the ESG every five years. It applies to the bachelor and master levels of education. The evaluation is based on the HEI’s self-evaluation report and the site-visit results. The panel of experts presents the site-visit results to the permanent specialty commission of the respective study domain. The report is submitted to the Accreditation Department for the validation of procedures, and then to the ARACIS Council. The Council verifies the report and the procedures and takes the final decision. The final decision is sent to the MoNE for endorsement. 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 to perform an additional evaluation if needed. The final decision is validated by the ARACIS Council. The result of the study program evaluations refers to the following three levels of confidence: confidence, limited confidence, and no confidence.

80. *The Role of ARACIS in Program Accreditation.* ARACIS has been designated by law to carry out program accreditation and periodical external evaluation on the national and international levels. ARACIS has the mission to improve the quality of the programs 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.

The Procedure of Program Accreditation

81. This section provides a concise description of the steps to be followed in the application of an external evaluation procedure carryout out by ARACIS.

82. The higher education institution in need of a program accreditation procedure as a first step submits a request to the ARACIS Quality Assurance Directorate requesting the provisional authorization (AP), the (re)accreditation (A) or the periodic evaluation (EVP) of one or more study programs on the First (Bachelor) or Second Cycle (Master). The Program Accreditation Request Form indicates the fields of study of the respective study program and the level of education of the educational offering (Bachelor or Master level). A study program belongs to a single domain of license or Master. Specialty experts from the Quality Assurance Direction check the eligibility of the request.

83. Based on the information provided, ARACIS submits 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. Once the contract is signed, the Department of Accreditation within ARACIS nominates an expert panel, usually consisting of 3-4 experts from the academia and industry representatives. In the case of a cluster accreditation, with a high number of programs, the standard audit team can be enlarged. The experts are specialists from the respective fields for which the accreditation is sought.

84. The ARACIS Council validates the recommendation received from the Department of Accreditation for the composition of the expert panel and informs the HEI. The HEI may object to the proposed panel by giving a valid reason for their non-suitability. In such a case, the ARACIS Council replaces the expert of the panel. However, the representatives of the reviewed programs are not allowed to propose specific experts.

85. The HEI 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 checked for formal completeness by the Specialty Experts from the ARACIS QA Directorate. Subsequently, the self-evaluation report is sent to the appointed team of experts for analysis within 15 days. The experts can ask for additional information through requests for clarification.

86. On the agreed date, the expert team conducts an on-site review visit to the HEI requesting the accreditation. The deadline for visits is a maximum of 6 months from the request receipt. During the on-site visit, the experts discuss with the program coordinators and other stakeholders on the programs under review about the SAR and any other relevant issue.

87. The outcomes of the accreditation visit are documented by the review team in the draft/proposal of the external evaluation report. This document is signed by all team members and by the representatives of the HEI under accreditation. When drafting the Site Visit Form, the data presented by the HEI for each program selected will be considered. This report is submitted to a relevant Specialty Commission for analysis and endorsement. This Committee will prepare another report with the results of the visit, proposing a temporary operation/authorization or temporary operation/non-authorization.

88. At the next stage, this draft report is submitted to the Permanent Speciality Commission for analysis and endorsement. This Commission prepares a report presenting the visit outcomes and recommend to keep or to discontinue the accreditation. This report is then submitted for analysis to the Accreditation Department of the ARACIS Board and, after that, to the ARACIS Board. As the last step, the ARACIS Board shall prepare the ARACIS Board Report, which will be published on the ARACIS website and also sent to the MoNE.

Conduct of the On-Site Visit

89. The evaluation visit shall take 2-3 days, including both the evaluation team's meetings and the visit of the HEI premises. 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. During the on-site visit itself, the following meetings are scheduled:

- a kick-off meeting with the management of the HEI/department/faculty/HEI is held. During this meeting, the main topics of the visit are discussed;
- A meeting with the teaching staff providing teaching and other support activities for the programs under review;
- A meeting with the students' representatives enrolled in the program, from the domain under evaluation, including students representing student associations;
- A meeting with the employers' representatives where graduates from the study programs under review typically work;
- A meeting with alumni of the programs under review;
- A visit to the facilities, infrastructure, and equipment used for teaching, learning, and research activities.

90. 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 of 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 are :

- Accreditation without Requirements. If all quality standards have been fulfilled, the accreditation is granted for the full duration of 5 years. In the case of temporary authorization, the period for accreditation is maximum two years after graduation of the first cohort of students
- Accreditation with Requirements. 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 request a new evaluation to be carried out by ARACIS. Otherwise, the report is final, based on Art. 34, paragraph (2) of GEO 75/2005.

91. When the external evaluation of a program results in recommendations, HEI submits a progress report within 2 years from the evaluation. This report is analyzed by the Permanent Specialty Commission of ARACIS, which looks at the recommendations' progress and issues conclusions in this respect, highlighting the measures to be implemented further, if applicable, and the deadline for submitting a new report.

Substantive Changes during the Accreditation Period

92. In case a program accredited by ARACIS is experiencing substantive changes related to available financial or staff resources or curricular content, the ARACIS is notified within 30 days from the change occurrence. ARACIS reserves the right to decide whether this change requires another external review.

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

93. The preparation of the self-assessment report gives the opportunity to use the internal quality management systems and self-examination processes that involve relevant stakeholders and to identify possible areas of improvement for the (further) development of a degree program. Ideally, the accreditation process will be utilized by the HEI as a quality enhancement project and will not be perceived as a regular inspection routine.

94. The higher education institution uses the self-assessment report to analyze in an aggregated manner if and how the degree program/s fulfill/s the accreditation criteria and which particularities have to be taken into account. Variations from the criteria can be explained. A particular focus is placed on evaluation and assessment rather than on description, for example, including strengths and weaknesses, challenges, and envisaged solutions. The "guiding questions" contained in the ARACIS checklist are designed to give some guidance. Typically, a short and clear evaluation of each criterion and a presentation of results against baseline suffices.

Selection of Evaluation Experts

95. ARACIS applies a rigorous procedure for identifying and training its experts involved in carrying out the program accreditation procedures on the Bachelor and Master level. As a minimum requirement, the team will consist of experts from academia (teaching staff and students) as well as industry representatives. The student representative shall be appointed by the student associations federations. When the field of study also includes (Master) programs with distance learning (DL) or reduced frequency (FR), one of the evaluators is expert in DL)FR as part of the Commission. The president of the Visiting Committee 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, if feasible, ARACIS will take into consideration a fair gender balance for non-discriminatory purposes.

Appeal procedure

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

97. New distinct procedures for addressing appeals and complaints were developed and applied after the approval of ESG 2015. Usually, appeals are received in cases when the ARACIS assessment/Recommendation is at a lower level from the expected one. The HEI usually contests the general procedural flaws, leading in its opinion to insufficient evidence of the assessment. Complaints may also refer to the alleged lack of integrity or improper behavior of the external evaluators.

98. Appeals (“contestații” – 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 notice/assessment after the external evaluation of study programs or the awarded advise/judgment after the external institutional evaluation. Appeals regarding the awarded Notice 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 drafts the final ARACIS Report after analyzing the documents and following debates.

99. 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 the resolution of the appeal. Based on the evaluation documents, the technical commission performs a reality check. If the procedural flaws are found to be real, the commission proposes to the ARACIS Council to resume the evaluation procedures in order to correct the reported issues. At the proposal of the Executive Board, the ARACIS Council approves 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. 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.

1.3. Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation

100. Criteria, standards, and indicators are the tools describing the quality requirements of the activities used when HEIs request temporary authorization/accreditation of a new institution, a new study program, or for periodical external evaluation. Standards correspond to the areas and criteria of QA in HE, and the indicators measure the degree of achievement of activity through reporting against the standard. Standards are formulated as rules or results and defined as the minimum mandatory level of achievement for an activity.

101. 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.

102. 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 QA. Such an approach is presented below.

103. The Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation emphasis on:

- Increased role of academic staff, students, and employers in elaborating on the institutional development strategy, bringing the Romanian higher education system closer to meeting the social needs and the evolution of the national and international labor markets.
- Regional and national recognition of Romanian HEIs as poles of excellence, based on the results and skills of graduates.
- The instrumental role of international QA to safeguard and continuously improve the quality of the programs, research, and services. For instance, increasing the role of QA 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 programs according to 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 administrative and technical services in the implementation of the institutional strategy and policies. Between the academic staff and students, the services allow the institution to deliver high-quality education and accommodate students and academic staff needs.
- Registration in the national and/or international ranking systems of the HEI.
- Achieving a high degree of compatibility between the educational process in Romania and the prestigious universities in the European and international areas.
- Ensuring academic integrity, students, and academic staff respecting a set of ethical values and principles such as academic freedom, moral integrity, intellectual correctness, honesty, collegiality, loyalty, responsibility, transparency, respect, and tolerance.

104. The areas/domains for QA, as defined by Romanian legislation (GO 75/2005, GD 915/2017), are Domain A. - Institutional Capacity, Domain B. - Educational Effectiveness, Domain C. - Quality management. For each domain, a set of quality standards, which are the quality expectations to be fulfilled by any Romanian institution, is listed. These domains and quality standards are featured below:

Domain A. - Institutional Capacity	
	<p>A.1 - Institutional, Administrative and Managerial Structures</p> <p>SA1_The institution’s mission, vision, and strategic plan are in alignment with its mission. The institution has adequate policies, processes, procedures, and instruments to achieve its mission and implement its strategic plans.</p> <p>SA2_Personnel, students, and other stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the institution’s strategy.</p> <p>SA3_Contribution of the institution to the social, economic, and cultural development at local, regional, and national levels, according to its mission.</p> <p>SA4_There is a clear and transparent division of tasks, responsibilities, and duties among the governing/leading authorities, decision-making</p>

	<p>bodies, and personnel (academic and non-academic staff).</p> <p>SA5_Students are involved in the administrative and decision-making processes and are incentivized to engage in the institution’s strategy and management.</p> <p>SA6_The institution pursues an open strategy of collaboration and partnership at the regional, national, European, and international levels.</p>
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Domain B. - Educational Effectiveness

	<p>B.1 - Content of Study Programs</p> <p>SB1_The institution ensures that new and existing programs reflect and continually adapt to the changing needs of the Romanian, regional, and international labor market, as well as societal needs.</p> <p>SB2_The institution ensures that study programs are adequately designed in terms of level (Bachelor/Master/Doctorate/Postgraduate), academic content, and educational quality, thereby supporting the learning process and the achievement of program objectives</p> <p>SB3_The institution has the capacity to run the study programs efficiently, in terms of human resources and learning environment.</p> <p>SB4_The institution defines clear goals for each study program, which are communicated to students and stakeholders.</p> <p>SB5_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>SB6_Admission requirements and student evaluation methods are clear, manageable, and publicly available.</p> <p>SB7_Mechanisms for student support and counseling are established for successful graduation, the continuation of studies, and career preparation/job placement-orientation.</p> <p>SB8_The institution ensures the inclusiveness of all students admitted.</p> <p>SB9_The institution has a supportive policy for extra-curricular activities and rewards the students' engagement.</p>
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	<p>SB10_The institution ensures the quality of exchange programs and international mobility (students, teachers, staff) and promotes mobility at all levels. Specific QA mechanisms are in place for mobility.</p> <p>SB11_The institution complies with quality indicators specific to joint programs.</p>
	<p>B.2 - Learning Outcomes</p> <p>SB12_The institution has and uses mechanisms to ensure that outcomes (of learning, employment, and the satisfaction of the different interest groups) can be measured, analyzed, and used for the enhancement of the quality of programs.</p> <p>SB13_The institution offers opportunities for the educational and professional needs of any student to follow, abandon, and resume the study programs.</p> <p>SB14_The institution has a clear policy on assessing student achievements (academic, internships, and other learning outcomes gained through the study programs), as well as on transfer of credits so that the assessment is fair, equitable, understandable for students and in line with the pedagogical approach of the institution.</p> <p>SB15_The institution supports projects of pedagogical innovation and excellence in order to improve the integration of graduates and to strengthen the innovation capacity by setting up innovative and employable courses.</p>
	<p>B.3 - Scientific Research Activities</p> <p>SB16_The institution ensures that the research projects contribute to and guarantee a high level of scientific quality in a relevant research area.</p> <p>SB17_The institution ensures the development of research policy at national and international levels through capitalization and dissemination of research results.</p> <p>SB18_Research activities are based on the institutional strategy and a systematic planning process.</p> <p>SB19_The institution promotes scientific research through the teaching process at study programs level.</p> <p>SB20_The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivize, assess, and reward research engagement.</p>

Domain C. - Quality Management	
	<p>C.1 - Quality Assurance Strategies and Procedures</p> <p>SC1_ The quality management system has a clearly defined structure, objectives, processes, and procedures in order to promote a QA culture.</p> <p>SC2_ The institution designs and implements policies with the objective of assuring and improving quality, especially for human resources, learning environment (infrastructures, equipment), and financial resources.</p>
	<p>C.2 - Quality of Teaching Staff</p> <p>SC3_ The institution has mechanisms to ensure that the hiring, management, and professional development processes of teaching staff are carried out taking into account the requirements of their corresponding functions.</p>

105. For each quality standard, a set of performance indicators is proposed. The performance indicators are to be used by the institution to demonstrate the fulfillment of the quality standards. The institution might propose other performance indicators that reflect its specificities. The list of indicators is not prescriptive, but using indicators is advised to assess the quality standard. For clarity, explanations and illustrations are presented above the set of *performance* indicators, in italics.

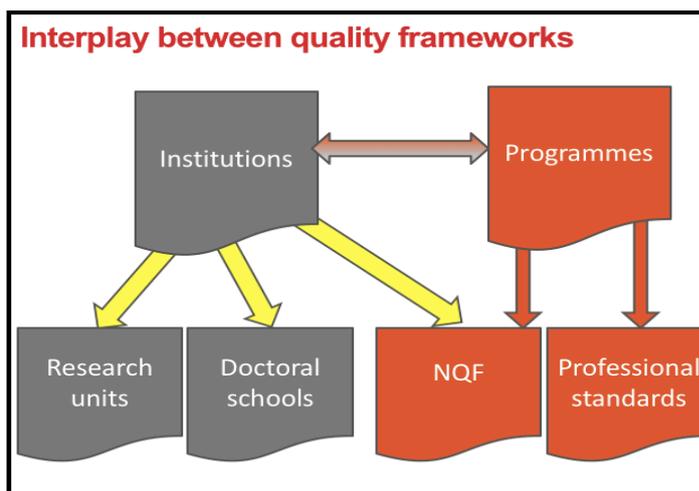
106. The Internal Quality Assurance manual will further present how to conduct the self-evaluation and use these Quality Standards for Institutional Evaluation.

The interplay between the different evaluation frameworks

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

108. There are quality standards specific to the programs that ARACIS provides. The specific standards have been defined on fundamental domains, but contain references to study programs (specialized disciplines). In addition, there will be quality standards specific to the doctoral schools, that will further specify the quality standards related to research activities. The QA Standards for Institutional Evaluation focus on institutional policies and not on the evaluation of laboratories, researchers, or doctoral education.

109. The QA Standards for Institutional Evaluation are compatible with any framework. They also respect the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for QA to which any institution of a country signatory of the Bologna Process is expected to adhere.



110. The main objectives of the revision of the quality framework are to assist the HEI in fostering internal QA for the benefit of continuous improvement of quality and to improve the relevance of the external QA 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.

The Terminology used for Quality Standards

111. The Methodology uses the terminology and the concepts established under the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005.

112. The terminology below is used for a common understanding of the Quality Standards for institutional evaluation.

Domain	Domains are the major areas of the QA system that are subject to evaluation, as defined by Romanian legislation (GO 75/2005, GD 915/2017).
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 study 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.
Evidence	Evidence is the information/data used to assess the degree/level of compliance of a standard.

Domain A. - Institutional Capacity

A.1 - Institutional, Administrative and Managerial Structures

113. SA1_The institution's mission, vision, and strategic plan are in alignment with its mission. The institution has adequate policies, processes, procedures, and instruments to achieve its mission and implement its strategic plan.

The mission is the likely future the institution aims to reach its "raison d'être" within the national orientations for higher education in Romania. The institution's strategy is drafted according to its mission and purpose. The strategy sets specific objectives (e.g., become a globalized 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 globalized 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.

The institution is able to keep track of the implementation of its mission, strategies, and action plans, thanks to mechanisms (e.g., feedback surveys). 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.

Performance indicators:

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 feasible and consistent with the national development priorities.
4. The institution ensures the consistency of institutional and faculty/department strategies that are supported by effective policies and procedures.
5. The institution provides equal opportunities for development and improvement for different units (faculty, departments, programs).
6. The institution has mechanisms that ensure the implementation of the charter of values (Carta) and its proper functioning.
7. The institution has an action plan, based on priorities and broken down into monitoring indicators.
8. The planning and evaluation processes are systematic, comprehensible, integrated, and appropriated to the institution.
9. The institution has monitoring structures and internal evaluation procedures.
10. The institution periodically monitors and evaluates its mission, objectives, and achievements by assessing its 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 supported to achieve the institution's mission and purpose.

114. SA2_Personnel, students, and other stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the institution's strategy.

There are mechanisms to consult and include the opinion of a vast range of internal and external actors, 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 internal and external stakeholders.

The institution incentivizes 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.

Performance indicators:

1. The academic staff is involved in the debates on the institutional strategy according to the internal procedures and regulations as set in the Carta.
2. The governance system takes into consideration students' views, as stakeholders, in their areas of interest (training, student affairs).
3. All personnel – teaching and non-teaching – is actively involved in the institution's strategy development process (design, implementation, follow-up, and evaluation). They are aware of 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).

115. SA3_Contribution of the institution to the social, economic, and cultural development at local, regional, and national levels, according to its mission.

The institution is a driver to the 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 research activities. For instance, academics cooperate with innovators, the institution provides courses on entrepreneurship to students, the institution supports incubators, internships are organized 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, sense of responsibility, and citizenship. The institution may engage in national debates such as the gender-based society or regulation of migrations.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution has a good reputation and is actively involved in the development of local or regional projects in cooperation with other universities, professional associations, or other stakeholders.
2. The institution is actively involved in local or regional socio-cultural initiatives on a regular basis.
3. The staff participates in collaborative initiatives developed with external partners.
4. The institution develops, participates in and manages service projects for community development or social assistance.
5. Service, development, or social assistance projects are actively used in teaching and provide research ideas.
6. Students engage in projects with societal or regional impact.

116. SA4_There is a clear and transparent division of tasks, responsibilities, and duties among the governing/leading authorities, decision-making bodies, and personnel (academic and non-academic staff).

The institution has an organization chart, as well as the description of tasks and responsibilities of staff (academic and non-academic). The transparency of decision-making is key to a well-functioning institution and ensures the buy-in of the community.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution has decision-making structures and bodies at all levels, each with their specific authority and power.

2. The academic and administrative staff, students, etc. have opportunities to participate in the 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 planning, development, and continuous improvement mechanisms, risk assessment, activity assessment of units, and their interaction.
5. There is a clear distribution of staff assignments and responsibilities within the institution. The institution has established a transparent information and communication system (internet, portals, emails, etc.) with students, staff, and stakeholders.

117. SA5_Students are involved in the administrative and decision-making processes and are incentivized to engage in the institution's strategy and management.

Students are adequately represented, according to transparent regulations. There are mechanisms ensuring that the students' voice counts for the decision-making process (e.g., a student representative at the department level). The institution showed how student democracy is incentivized (e.g., through training of student representatives) and rewarded (e.g., through credits).

Performance indicators:

1. Students are represented in the governing bodies of the faculties and institution.
2. Student Associations express opinions and elaborate proposals on all aspects of the general interest of the institution (e.g., educational plans, research programs, social aspects, regulations, etc.).
3. The institution supports student councils or other forms of representation and finances their activities according to the law.

118. SA6_The institution pursues an open strategy of collaboration and partnership at the regional, national, European, and international levels.

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

Openness should, at the same time, occur at the 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 synergies. The institution may carry out diagnosis for the territory and provide high-level expertise in many domains.

Like for internationalization, 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.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution determines its cooperation policy priorities with the relevant stakeholders at local, national, or international. The stakeholders might be HEIs, employers, public authorities, NGOs.
2. The cooperation strategy is reflected in the long-term strategy of institutional development, as well as in the regional, national, and international development strategies.
3. The institution takes into account the needs of the regional economy and labor market when opening new programs or writing scientific research projects.

4. The institution collaborates with regional partners in the implementation of the cooperation strategy.
5. The institution collaborates with other institutions to provide student services that help them succeed in their studies, professional and personal development.
6. The institution has defined objectives regarding teaching, learning, and research activity, internationalization, governance, and relationship with the society that fit into the national and regional context.
7. The aspects regarding the societal development of the institutional strategy correspond to the institutional profile. The institution's profile on teaching, learning, research, and services fit into the regional, national, and international context.

Domain B. - Educational Effectiveness

B.1 - Content of Study Programs

119. SB1_The institution ensures that new and existing programs reflect and continually adapt to the changing needs of the Romanian, regional, and international labor market, as well as societal needs.

The study program pursues specific qualification objectives. These objectives cover scientific, professional, and interdisciplinary aspects and refer in particular to the academic competencies necessary for qualified employment, skills of social commitment, and personal development.

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

The institution should explain how it concretely mobilizes relevant external stakeholders, including potential employers and graduates, through a continuous dialogue on programs, their objectives, contents, and results.

Performance indicators:

1. The study program is established in compliance with the national legal requirements, while its objectives are developed according to the institutional strategy.
2. The study programs reflect the labor market and societal needs and stipulate the competences to be acquired by students.
3. The learning outcomes approach is being implemented incrementally at the program level.
4. The study programs aim to provide students with specialized and interdisciplinary knowledge, as well as specific and general academic competences.
5. The institution collaborates with the socio-economic environment to identify its needs and periodically updates the content of the study programs.
6. The institution accommodates the appropriate learning environment (physical and virtual), including premises and equipment.
7. The institution has specific processes and procedures for establishing new study programs (design, validation, revision).
8. The institution regularly assesses, using specific mechanisms, the objectives, contents, and learning outcomes of the study programs and their impacts on student learning. The institution identifies the labor market needs and tracks students to provide evidence of their success and program effectiveness.

120. SB2_The institution ensures that study programs are adequately designed in terms of level (Bachelor/Master/Doctorate/Postgraduate), academic content, and educational quality, thereby supporting the learning process and the achievement of program objectives.

The institution should demonstrate how the program targets the right level of education (BA/MA/Ph.D./Postgraduate). The academic staff should be recruited and trained to deliver the appropriate teaching activities and support for students' success.

Performance indicators:

1. The study programs are offered in line with the Bologna Process, on successive levels: Bachelor, Master, Doctorate, Postgraduate, and ensure continuity of study programs content across the different levels, based on academic interdependence of disciplines and transversality.
2. The curriculum is organized to facilitate an easy student learning path (e.g., modularization, recognition of prior learning), while teaching materials are based on modern pedagogical principles.
3. The study programs are designed to facilitate students' mobility and ensure the transfer and recognition of credits.
4. The institution offers postgraduate programs as a form of lifelong learning.
5. The study programs are organized 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;
 - Mature students are aiming at studying for professional purposes, completing their education, curiosity, self-fulfillment.
6. The institution uses appropriate assessment methods to evaluate students learning experience (theoretical and practical knowledge, transversal skills, etc.), curriculum, and teaching methods.
7. The institution preserves and guarantees the quality of education, and provides the necessary facilities for all forms of study: frequency education (full-time), reduced frequency (part-time), and distance learning.

121. SB3_The institution has the capacity to run the study programs efficiently, in terms of human resources and learning environment.

The institution makes sure the number of teaching staff and their qualification corresponds to the needs of the study programs, not only academically, but also on other dimensions like student counseling, support for success. There is a human resources policy known by all teaching staff. The institution has adequate policies, mechanisms, and funding to provide professional development of staff.

The institution should consider students' knowledge acquired in formal and informal contexts, including non-academic knowledge (e.g., social attitudes), and entrepreneurial spirit. Institutions may want to take into account values and principles such as integrity, respect for others, gender-positive attitude, climate change, protective learning environment, anti-radicalism, etc.

Performance indicators:

1. The implementation of the study program is carefully and efficiently planned, and rigorously monitored, while the program content and activities are communicated to students well in advance.
2. The teaching activities are carried out to achieve the study program objectives (e.g., infrastructure, size of groups), using modern teaching methods and adequate IT technologies.
3. The qualifications of teaching staff correspond to the academic requirements of the study program.
4. The teaching methods are evaluated and adjusted on a regular basis. The institution applies internal evaluation methods. The institution analyzes the human, physical, and financial resources for the new study programs (classrooms, laboratories, computers, learning materials, etc.).
5. The institution has set up a teacher evaluation system that values the quality of pedagogy.
6. The institution ensures new and easily accessible learning resources irrespective of the form of education, and also adequate support to students.
7. The institution provides students with systematic, substantial, and sequential opportunities to acquire essential skills and knowledge, in compliance with study programs objectives. The institution is actively engaged in improving the educational process by running surveys among all relevant stakeholders.

122. SB4_The institution defines clear goals for each study program, which are communicated to students and stakeholders.

The students should clearly know what they can get out of the study programs. The employers should understand how the study programs match with their needs. The academic staff should make sure the student-centered approach is a reality in the study programs/courses taught in the design, the pedagogy, and the evaluation of students. The European ECTS User's Guide provides relevant and concrete examples on how to improve this quality standard.

Performance indicators:

1. The expected learning outcomes correspond to the study level (Bachelor, or Master).
2. The content and the expected learning outcomes of the study program correspond to the study level (Bachelor, Master, Doctoral).
3. The institution sets out the objectives of the requirements of each study program and communicates them to students.
4. The expected learning outcomes have been adequately translated into the educational objectives of the curriculum.
5. The institution uses ECTS, and credit points correspond to the expected learning outcomes and workload of students.
6. The expected learning outcomes are in line with the regional, national, or international perspective of the requirements set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the study program. The expected learning outcomes are in compliance with relevant legislation and regulations.
7. The expected learning outcomes are evaluated at the end of each semester, and lead to changes in structure or resources, if appropriate.
8. The curriculum enables students to master research, academic, and professional skills.

9. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centered approach).

123. SB5_The curriculum design, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring, and review processes are in alignment with national requirements and the institution's vision and strategy.

The institution demonstrates the programs are monitored and adapted to the situations met by the students. The study programs are fully harnessed in the institutional strategy and fulfils the national regulations.

Performance indicators:

1. Professionalism and ethical behavior of human resources are guaranteed at the level of the study program and ensure its successful implementation.
2. The selection and appointment processes of teaching staff are appropriate. Interdisciplinary links with other study programs are taken into consideration.
3. The qualitative and quantitative sufficiency of the equipment and spaces necessary for the successful implementation of the study program are guaranteed.
4. The study disciplines in the curriculum are provided in a logical sequence, clearly define the general and specialized competencies specific to the education field, ensure compatibility with the National Qualifications Framework and similar plans and programs from other European and international states, using the ECTS.
5. The institution complies with the national standards on the approval, monitoring, and periodic evaluation of the study programs and diplomas corresponding to qualifications.

124. SB6_Admission requirements and student evaluation methods are clear, manageable, and publicly available.

The institutions should 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 addressed to students with disabilities concerning the study program, educational 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 programs, pursue studies, enroll in 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 HEIs around Europe and the world.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution shall inform the candidates about the access conditions to the study programs and the job opportunities.
2. The institution shall apply in a coherent manner public regulations and procedures 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 students about the structure of the study programs, the competences that can be acquired, the education resources, the means of communications, the available facilities (libraries, professional counseling etc.), the forms of evaluation.

4. Admission requirements and student selection procedures correspond to the standards of the study program in agreement with the perspective of the expected learning outcomes.
5. Information for candidates and for students with disabilities regarding the study program, the educational process, and the support measures shall be published.
6. The institution welcomes and pursues specific policies for the absorption and the integration of new students.
7. The institution has policies, means, and resources to reduce the drop-out rate.

125. SB7_Mechanisms for student support and counseling are established for successful graduation, the continuation of studies, and career preparation/job placement-orientation.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution stimulates the students' contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning by inviting them to conferences, seminars, and other events.
2. The institution fosters communication with alumni and the creation of an alumni community.
3. The institution engages in informing and orientating the students.
4. The institution has established mechanisms for counseling and supporting students. A structure is established to support students in all cycles of study provided by the institution.
5. The institution has policies and procedures that support students' academic progress.
6. The institution applies traditional and alternative teaching methods, using modern technologies, depending on the interests and the learning capacity of students in order to facilitate their skills acquisition and reduce the drop-out rate.
7. The institution assists and guides students on how to access resources and virtual libraries.

126. SB8_The institution ensures the inclusiveness of all students admitted.

Performance indicators:

1. The teaching-learning process takes into account the diversity of students and their needs, providing flexible learning pathways.
2. The 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 innovative teaching methods to ensure quality training, including students with learning difficulties.
4. The institution supports research and the implementation of new learning methods to foster interdisciplinary and flexible learning modes for students to develop transversal skills.
5. The institution has transparently implemented provisions for the promotion of gender equality and equal opportunity for students in difficulty and other vulnerable groups.
6. The institution pursues a policy of support for Roma students, students with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and other vulnerable groups.
7. The institution pursues a policy of support for students engaging in sports activities at high levels.

8. The institution pursues a policy of support for students wishing to pursue part-time or distance-learning studies.

127. SB9_The institution has a supportive policy for extra-curricular activities and rewards students' engagement.

Performance indicators:

1. For the benefit of the students, institution, and society, the institution incorporates community engagement in its activities, with the objective of:
 - a. Enriching scholarship, research, and creative activities;
 - b. Enhancing teaching and learning;
 - c. Facilitating the preparation of educated and engaged citizens;
 - d. Strengthening students' democratic values and civic responsibility;
 - e. Addressing critical societal issues and contributing to the public good.
2. The institution pursues a policy to facilitate student life.
3. The institution facilitates the integration of students into the university environment, supporting them in choosing the most appropriate cultural and social options specific to student life.
4. The institution is actively and regularly involved in regional socio-cultural initiatives.
5. The institution supports students engaging in sports activities organized by its structures and other institutions.

128. SB10_The institution ensures the quality of exchange programs and international mobility (students, teachers, staff) and promotes mobility at all levels. Specific QA mechanisms are in place for mobility.

The institution should demonstrate how its study programs are designed to facilitate student mobility, both outgoing and incoming. Mobility might be enlarged to academic and non-academic staff. The institution makes sure credits awarded in the home country or abroad are accumulated and transferred through the equivalence of parts or complete study programs. The European ECTS User's Guide provides relevant and concrete examples on how to improve this quality standard.

Performance indicators:

1. The study program has a structure linked to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), as well as an assessment system tailored to the form of education, level, and field of study. Students are provided with information about the structure, learning content, and outcomes, didactic methods, forms of assessment, number of credits, etc.
2. The curriculum is consistent with the study program's objectives.
3. The mobility exchanges, if offered in the study program, should be integrated into the curriculum.
4. The credits awarded in a foreign HEI within the framework of a mutual agreement are transferred without review.
5. The institution promotes exchange programs and international mobility among students, academic and non-academic staff.

129. SB11_The institution complies with quality indicators specific to joint programs.

The joint programs are consistent programs, jointly offered by the institutions which partner within a consortium sharing the same goals and rules. The indicators below ensures that the institution engaged in a joint program plays its QA part within the consortium.

Performance indicators:

1. Recognition of qualification and 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 program would typically require a total of 180-240 ECTS. A joint Master's program would typically require 60-90-120 ECTS. The institution monitors the credits and the average time to complete the study program.
3. The institution agrees with foreign institutions on the terms and conditions of the joint program through a cooperation agreement.
4. The degree belongs to the higher education degree system of the country in which the institution is based.

B.2 - Learning Outcomes

130. SB12_The institution has and uses mechanisms to ensure that outcomes (of learning, employment, and the satisfaction of the different stakeholders) can be measured, analyzed, and used for the enhancement of the quality of programs.

The institution has the capacity to deliver the study program at the highest quality level and monitor its implementation. Risks are anticipated, deviations and outdated are adequately addressed so that the learning outcomes and the ultimate utility of the study program to be secured. The teaching staff, students, and external stakeholders have a say in the monitoring and the adaptation of the study programs. Specific quality requirements are now expected for distance learning courses.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution has a QA procedure in place, and ensures the quality of the teaching and learning process, regardless of how and where it is offered. Frequency education (full-time), reduced frequency (part-time), and distance learning are clearly integrated into the educational policy and the evaluation system.
2. The institution has developed specific structures, procedures, and resources for reduced frequency, and distance learning:
 - Institutional structure specialized in management of reduced frequency education and distance education;
 - Teaching capacities in relation to the content and distant delivery mode;
 - Teaching capacities in creating inter-activity amongst students and academics;
 - Appropriate educational and infrastructure resources (e.g., course support, etc.);
 - Face-to-face sessions to provide general orientation and introduction to the course materials, guidance for the problematic aspects of the course; revision work to learners;
 - Quality-ensured examination system.
3. The institution has created specific QA mechanisms for all forms of education (full time, reduced frequency, distance learning).
4. The institution periodically monitors and evaluates the implementation of study programs to ensure that they meet their objectives and the needs of students and society.

5. The institution has defined indicators to evaluate students on an on-going basis and effectively evaluates learning outcomes. The results achieved are continuously monitored and documented.
6. The institution encourages students to provide feedback through participation in assessing the academic performance of teachers. The students elected in the management structures participate in the design, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring of study programs and educational plans.
7. The quality of study programs is also evaluated by statistics of graduates employed in relevant fields.

131. SB13_The institution offers opportunities for the educational and professional needs of any student to follow, abandon, and resume the study programs.

The students are allowed to make choices, change orientation, discover new learning opportunities, and value previous experience. There is no longer a consistent learning trajectory. To allow such flexibility, the institution must set appropriate mechanisms, inform students, teaching and administrative staff of their existence, and assess their effectiveness.

Performance indicators:

1. The Bachelor and Master degree programs allow a progressive transition from the first to the second cycle, ensuring continuity of training.
2. The degree programs of the first-cycle studies provide students with basic knowledge, general scientific methods, and principles.
3. The institution has appropriate mechanisms and procedures to ensure pathways and recognition of prior learning.
4. The credits awarded in any HEI within the framework of a mutual agreement are transferred without review. The institution provides opportunities to transfer credits awarded in the home country or abroad through the equivalence of parts or complete study programs.
5. The institution ensures that the study programs for reduced frequency or distance learning benefit from access to online platforms and other tools to provide students with a quality education.

132. SB14_The institution has a clear policy on assessing student achievements (academic, internships, and other learning outcomes gained through the study programs), as well as on transfer of credits so that the assessment is fair, equitable, understandable for students and in line with the pedagogical approach of the institution.

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.

Performance indicators:

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 to 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.

133. SB15_The institution supports projects of pedagogical innovation and excellence in order to improve the integration of graduates and to strengthen the innovation capacity by setting up innovative and employable courses.

This standard relates to all measures and incentives taken by the institution to trigger innovation of teaching and learning and reward the commitment of academic staff. The standard focuses more on the quality of teaching and staff support for student achievements than on the individual performance review of teachers, which each institution designs according to the legislation.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution has in place procedures for periodic assessment of teachers' performance, based on clear, transparent criteria.
2. The institution encourages training and promotion of academic staff.
3. The institution engages national and international teaching staff in committees/panels.
4. The institution has in place a support structure to promote continuous teaching training.
5. The institution provides programs to ensure the continuous training of teaching staff.
6. The teaching materials are designed based on modern pedagogical principles (use of digital and communication technologies, experiential teaching methods, etc.).
7. The academic, research, and administrative staff are committed to improving teaching-learning-evaluation processes.

B.3 - Scientific Research Activities

134. SB16_The institution ensures that the research projects contribute to and guarantee a high level of scientific quality in a relevant research area.

The institution triggers research, supports academics, and creates an enabling environment for research. An institutional research policy would help the consistency of the research in the benefit of the institutional reputation, allowing the whole academic community and students to reap the benefits of a research-engaged institution. This standard is furthermore a strong relation with the internationalization, as research is intrinsically a cross-border activity.

In the same time, students might be invited to participate in project-based activities with companies that will not result in a scientific article. Students might be engaged in entrepreneurship and start a business resulting in a patent. Research should be considered in its broader sense.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution promotes a culture of research and ensures that there is a common understanding of the nature, role, and objectives of the research activity.
2. The institution has in place standards, procedures, and processes for the approval of research proposals and theses, and for the supervision of research studies.

3. The institution has in place research policies and ensures adequate infrastructure and resources to facilitate innovative research.
4. The institution has an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the research activities.
5. The institution responds to research ethics requirements.

135. SB17_The institution ensures the development of research policy at national and international levels through capitalization and dissemination of research results.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution supports and rewards participation in international research .
2. The institution has the ability to create scientific and socio-economic partnerships in order to conduct research in areas of national interest.
3. The institution knows its own human potential, material, and financial resources, as well as the opportunities offered by the 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 internationalization strategy.

136. SB18_Research activities are based on the institutional strategy and a systematic planning process.

Performance indicators:

1. Research activity is in compliance with the mission and the strategy of the Institution and with the developments and the important issues at the international level.
2. The vision and strategy of the research are elaborated in consultation with the stakeholders of the institution.
3. The priorities of the research activity 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.

137. SB19_The institution promotes scientific research through the teaching process at study programs level.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution ensures the development of research teams/groups, research laboratories, organization of workshops, the involvement of the students in research activities; participation of staff and students in scientific conferences.
2. The institution ensures the mutual integration of science and education.
3. The institution ensures that the results of the research work are integrated into the learning process.
4. The study programs shall enriched and updated by taking up the results of scientific research.
5. The institution shall ensure the support and updating of the teaching-learning process.

6. The institution encourages the integration of students and doctoral students into research programs.

138. SB20_The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivize, assess, and reward research engagement.

Performance indicators:

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 establishes research structures based on criteria taking into account research priorities, scientific skills, human potential, and infrastructure.
3. 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.
4. The institution monitors and evaluates the institutional (or faculty or departmental) research policy and strategy.
5. The institution has regulations, tools, and means to support research entities.
6. The institution has a procedure for conducting institutional self-assessment through auditing in order to maintain accreditation through external evaluation.
7. The scientific equipment is shared between the various research entities of the institution.
8. The institution supports and rewards research performance, productivity, and values scientific impact.
9. The institution organizes the evaluation of doctoral studies on a regular basis. The results of this evaluation are the basis of the improvements made.
10. The institution encourages innovation and the emergence of innovative teams and programs.
11. The institution has an internal and external communication strategy that is relevant and adapted to the different target audiences in the field of research.
12. The institution has a policy of promoting and transferring results of research.

Domain C. - Quality Management

C.1 - Quality Assurance Strategies and Procedures

139. SC1_The quality management system has a clearly defined structure, objectives, processes, and procedures in order to promote a QA culture.

The institution demonstrates that there is an institutional commitment for QA (for the directorate, deans, department leaders), proving that the institution is self-regulating its activities. The institution defines its own QA strategy, which contains the elements of an internal QA 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 QA system is incorporated into the institution's strategy and efficiently supports its development. The institution periodically analyses the relevance of its QA system and makes the necessary adjustments. The institution has a regular practice of internal evaluation. The institution has set up a QA unit at the institutional level and assigned QA focal points in faculties and departments. 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).

Performance indicators:

1. The QA policies cover all elements of the institutional activities.
2. The QA policies are institutionalized and operationalized into structures and clearly defined through appropriate, effective, and efficient mechanisms and methods.
3. The internal QA system is enforced at all levels across the institution.
4. The institution defines quality standards for its main processes in areas such as teaching, evaluation, research, internationalization, cooperation, and services in the benefit of society.
5. The relevant stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of QA policies.
6. The institution assesses the effectiveness of planning and evaluation activities on an ongoing basis in order to further enhance the implementation of the QA policies.
7. The information gathered from students, alumni, employers, and other stakeholders are used for quality improvement.
8. The institution has clear procedures, known by all academic and administrative staff, for principal activities/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 substantiate its decision.

140. SC2_The institution designs and implements policies with the objective of assuring and improving quality, especially for human resources, learning environment (infrastructures, equipment), and financial resources.

QA should be devoted to the organizational and financial aspects 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 adequately managed and enhanced. The institution has set appropriate mechanisms and assigns the right staff.

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 a particular structure for its financial management and financial policy implementation. The institution pursues a transparent policy for the distribution of financial resources. The institution analyses indicators from the 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.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution provides the necessary financial resources in the short and long term based on thorough needs analysis.

2. The institution and its structures (faculties, departments) conduct periodic assessments of governance and management, educational policies, research, internationalization, cooperation, and services for the benefit of the society and make adequate decisions.
3. The institution is systematically concerned with selection, professional development, and training of human resources.
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 activities (access to documentation, infrastructure, etc.)
6. The IT infrastructure is efficiently managed, periodically maintained in good working condition, and updated in line with the latest developments of the IT technologies and media.

C.2 - Quality of Teaching Staff

141. SC3_The institution has mechanisms to ensure that the hiring, management, and professional development processes of teaching staff are carried out taking into account the requirements their corresponding functions.

The institution provides criteria and procedures for the selection of staff in its internal regulations. The institution publishes employment criteria for each vacant job position. 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 organize an information day by preparing informational brochures. The institution pursues a favorable policy for integration of its staff in its social life.

Performance indicators:

1. The institution makes public its organization chart.
2. The institution has a robust, fair, and transparent mechanism for selection of staff.
3. The duties and responsibilities of the personnel correspond to their qualifications and experience.
4. The staff is aware of their tasks and contributes to enhancing the institution's strategy and activities.
5. The number of staff employed is suitable for developing all the institution's current and planned activities, including didactic, research, and administrative activities.
6. The institution follows a training plan according to the priorities defined in the 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 implements integration policies for its staff.

1.4. Quality Standards for Program Accreditation

142. This part is a compilation of the relevant general criteria for program accreditation on the Bachelor and Master level. The 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 ministers of education during their Bologna follow-up conference in Yerevan, Armenia, in the 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 the provider of External QA services.

143. 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 own studies. These are compiled in a separate document and have to be used in conjunction with these general criteria.

144. 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.

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

Domain A.: Institutional Capacity

Criteria: A.1 Institutional, administrative and managerial structures –

146. Standard: A.1.1 Legal organizational and operating framework - Indicators

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

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>).

147. Standard: A.1.2 Aims, Learning Outcomes and Qualification Profile of the study program under review - Indicators

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 takes place in an organized manner and the results are adequately documented.

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 labor market. The program outcomes allow graduates to get a job on the labor market in positions that correspond to the obtained qualification.

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.

148. Standard: A.1.3 Academic integrity- Indicators

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

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.

149. Standard: A.1.4 Public liability and responsibility - Indicators

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 is prepared on an annual basis.

150. Standard: A.1.5 internal Rules and Regulations - Indicators

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 organized the record of the academic activity of the students in accordance with the legislation in force, by forms homologated in this respect (catalogs, summary documents, academic records, transcripts, diplomas, etc.).

151. Standard: A.1.6 Financial activity - Indicators

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

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.

Criteria: A.2 Facilities (ESG 1.6)**152. Standard: A.2.1 Availability of educational establishments - Indicators**

The institution of higher education disposes of its own premises²⁴ or rented premises, which are adequate for carrying out its educational and research activities in the programs to be accredited.

The capacity of the educational facilities (classrooms, 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.

153. Standard: A.2.2 Endowment of the educational establishments - Indicators

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

154. Standard: A.2.3 Availability and endowment of scientific research premises - Indicators

²⁴ According to legal stipulations, at least 70% of the premises must be owned by the applying institution.

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.

155. Standard: A.2.4 Availability and endowment of the library - Indicators

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 are 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.

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.

Criteria: A.3 Human resource (ESG 1.5)

156. Standard: A.3.1 Quality of teaching staff - Indicators

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.

The academic staff from the study program are hired according to the recruitment criteria established at the 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 primary workload or reserved position, and at least 25% of them are covered by university teaching staff and associate professors. The tenured teachers from the higher education cover, during a university year, a maximum of three workloads irrespective of the educational institution in which they carry out their activity.

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.

The tenured teachers have a 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.)

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

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 consent from the university senate of the respective institution. The teachers who occupy positions of assistant have certified pedagogical training.

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

157. Standard: A.3.2 Availability of auxiliary staff necessary to implement the study program - Indicators

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.

Domain B.: Educational Effectiveness

Criteria: B.1 Content of the study programs (ESG 1.2, 1.3, 1.4)

158. Standard: B.1.1 Students admission - Indicators

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.

The students are recruited based on their 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.

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

159. Standard: B.1.2 Structure and delivery of the study program - Indicators

The presented program curriculum is approved at the 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 holders, and by the head of the department.

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.

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.

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 the national level and with the field-specific standards developed by ARACIS.

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

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

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, the modality of organization and guidance, persons in charge from the education institution and practice unit, etc. are defined.

160. Standard: B.1.3 Partnerships - Indicators

The partnerships concluded with public and private organizations 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.

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

Criteria: B.2 Learning results (ESG 1.3, 1.4)

161. Standard: B.2.1 Passing rate of students - Indicators

The pass rates in the program under review are sufficient²⁵.

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 who pass from one year into another (as credited students), time to graduation. The results of the monitoring confirm the efficiency of the educational process.

162. Standard: B.2.2 Valorisation of the university qualification by hiring on the labor market or by continuing the university studies - Indicators

The educational institution monitors on an 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.

The results of the process of monitoring the insertion of the graduates on the labor 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 labor market²⁶.

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 program aims and outcomes in relation to the needs of the labor market.

163. Standard: B.2.3 Level of satisfaction of the students in relation to the professional and personal development provided by the university - Indicators

The higher education institution collects students' opinions 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).

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

164. Standard: B.2.4 Student-centered learning - Indicators

The teaching 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 the 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.

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

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.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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 programme enrol in Master's degree programmes irrespective of the field.

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.

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.

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

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.

Criteria: B.3 Scientific research activity

165. Standard: B.3.1 Research programming - Indicators

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.

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

166. Standard: B.3.2 Research resources - Indicators

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

167. Standard: B.3.3 Performance and valorization of research - Indicators

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 centers, science parks, or other forms of valorization, development of new products, etc.

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

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

The faculty organizes 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 organized activity.

Domain C.: Quality Management

168. Criteria: C.1 QA strategies and procedures (ESG 1.1) - Indicators

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.

The QA 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.

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

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 QA, which it makes public.

169. Criteria: C.2 Procedures regarding the initiation, monitoring and periodic review of study programs (ESG 1.9) - Indicators

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

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

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

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

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

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

The evaluation methods are diverse, and they encourage critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork.

The methods and criteria used to evaluate the students with regard to the developed skills and competencies 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 each semester.

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.

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

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.

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

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 particular activity was carried out shall be considered. Representatives of the industry are invited to participate in the presentation of the graduation theses.

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.

171. Criteria: C.4 Procedures of regular quality assessment of the academic staff (ESG 1.5) - Indicators

The internal peer-review is organized on a regular basis, being based on general criteria and bright, transparent and public procedures.

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

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.

172. Criteria: C.5 Accessibility of the adequate learning resources (ESG 1.3, 1.6) - Indicators

The study program provides proper 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.

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

The faculty disposes of incentive programs for the students with outstanding results and recovery programs 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.

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 center, various advisory services, which have efficient management. The students are informed of the existence of such services.

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 center, various advisory services, which have efficient management. The students are informed of the existence of such services.

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.

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.

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 Relations Office, commissions for the recognition of formally or non-formally acquired qualifications/ skills and competences, etc.

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.

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

173. Criteria: C.6 Information management (ESG 1.7) - Indicators

At the 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 organization and operation of the study programs and of the other activities.

174. Criteria: C.7 Transparency of the information of public interest with regard to the study programs (ESG 1.8) - Indicators

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

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

175. Criteria: C.8 QA by periodic external review (ESG 1.10) - Indicators

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

Annexes

I. Template for Evaluation Report



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

Accreditation of the University of...

Final report | Date

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1. The accreditation procedure

What are 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;*
- *Programs 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 the 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 a brief presentation of current occupation.*
- *The 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 Fulfillment of the quality standards

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

2.4 Conclusions of the Experts Committee

A 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 (judgment based on a set of evidence, against the suggested criteria)*
3. *Conclusions: is the quality standard met?*
4. *Recommendations, including a 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 the site visit

II. The domains, criteria, quality standards, and performance indicators for the institutional evaluation

Domain A. - Institutional Capacity	
A.1 - Institutional, Administrative and Managerial Structures	
SA1_The institution's mission, vision, and strategic plan are in alignment with its mission. The institution has adequate policies, processes, procedures, and instruments to achieve its mission and implement its strategic plans.	<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 feasible and consistent with the national development priorities. 4. The institution ensures the consistency of institutional and faculty/department strategies that are supported by effective policies and procedures. 5. The institution provides equal opportunities for development and improvement for different units (faculty, departments, programs). 6. The institution has mechanisms that ensure the implementation of the charter of values (Carta) and its proper functioning. 7. The institution has an action plan, based on priorities and broken down into monitoring indicators. 8. The planning and evaluation processes are systematic, comprehensible, integrated, and appropriated to the institution. 9. The institution has monitoring structures and internal evaluation procedures. 10. The institution periodically monitors and evaluates its mission, objectives, and achievements by assessing its 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 supported to achieve the institution's mission and purpose.
SA2_Personnel, students, and other stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of the institution's strategy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The academic staff is involved in the debates on the institutional strategy according to the internal procedures and regulations as set in the Carta. 2. The governance system takes into consideration students' views, as stakeholders, in their areas of interest (training, student affairs). 3. All personnel – teaching and non-teaching – is actively involved in the institution's strategy development process (design, implementation, follow-up, and evaluation). They are aware of 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).
SA3_Contribution of the institution to the social, economic, and cultural development at local, regional, and national levels, according to its mission.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution has a good reputation and is actively involved in the development of local or regional projects in cooperation with other universities, professional associations, or other stakeholders. 2. The institution is actively involved in local or regional socio-cultural initiatives on a regular basis. 3. The staff participates in collaborative initiatives developed with external partners. 4. The institution develops, participates in and manages service projects for community development or social assistance. 5. Service, development, or social assistance projects are actively used in teaching and provide research ideas. 6. Students engage in projects with societal or regional impact.

<p>SA4_There is a clear and transparent division of tasks, responsibilities, and duties among the governing/leading authorities, decision-making bodies, and personnel (academic and non-academic staff).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution has decision-making structures and bodies at all levels, each with their specific authority and power. 2. The academic and administrative staff, students, etc. have opportunities to participate in the 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 planning, development, and continuous improvement mechanisms, risk assessment, activity assessment of units, and their interaction. 5. There is a clear distribution of staff assignments and responsibilities within the institution. The institution has established a transparent information and communication system (internet, portals, emails, etc.) with students, staff, and stakeholders.
<p>SA5_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 the governing bodies of the faculties and institution. 2. Student Associations express opinions and elaborate proposals on all aspects of the general interest of the institution (e.g., educational plans, research programs, social aspects, regulations, etc.). 3. The institution supports student councils or other forms of representation and finances their activities according to the law.
<p>SA6_The institution pursues an open strategy of collaboration and partnership at the regional, national, European, and international levels.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution determines its cooperation policy priorities with the relevant stakeholders at local, national, or international. The stakeholders might be HEIs, employers, public authorities, NGOs. 2. The cooperation strategy is reflected in the long-term strategy of institutional development, as well as in the regional, national, and international development strategies. 3. The institution takes into account the needs of the regional economy and labor market when opening new programs or writing scientific research projects. 4. The institution collaborates with regional partners in the implementation of the cooperation strategy. 5. The institution collaborates with other institutions to provide student services that help them succeed in their studies, professional and personal development. 6. The institution has defined objectives regarding teaching, learning, and research activity, internationalization, governance, and relationship with the society that fit into the national and regional context. 7. The aspects regarding the societal development of the institutional strategy correspond to the institutional profile. The institution’s profile on teaching, learning, research, and services fit into the regional, national, and international context.
<p>Domain B. - Educational Effectiveness</p>	
<p>B.1 - Content of Study Programs</p>	
<p>SB1_The institution ensures that new and existing programs reflect and continually adapt to the changing needs of the Romanian, regional, and international labor market, as well as societal needs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The study program is established in compliance with the national legal requirements, while its objectives are developed according to the institutional strategy. 2. The study programs reflect the labor market and societal needs and stipulate the competences to be acquired by students. 3. The learning outcomes approach is being implemented incrementally at the program level. 4. The study programs aim to provide students with specialized and interdisciplinary knowledge, as well as specific and general academic competences.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The institution collaborates with the socio-economic environment to identify its needs and periodically updates the content of the study programs. 6. The institution accommodates the appropriate learning environment (physical and virtual), including premises and equipment. 7. The institution has specific processes and procedures for establishing new study programs (design, validation, revision). 8. The institution regularly assesses, using specific mechanisms, the objectives, contents, and learning outcomes of the study programs and their impacts on student learning. The institution identifies the labor market needs and tracks students to provide evidence of their success and program effectiveness.
<p>SB2_The institution ensures that study programs are adequately designed in terms of level (Bachelor/Master/Doctorate/Postgraduate), academic content, and educational quality, thereby supporting the learning process and the achievement of program objectives.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The study programs are offered in line with the Bologna Process, on successive levels: Bachelor, Master, Doctorate, Postgraduate, and ensure continuity of study programs content across the different levels, based on academic interdependence of disciplines and transversality. 2. The curriculum is organized to facilitate an easy student learning path (e.g., modularization, recognition of prior learning), while teaching materials are based on modern pedagogical principles. 3. The study programs are designed to facilitate students' mobility and ensure the transfer and recognition of credits. 4. The institution offers postgraduate programs as a form of lifelong learning. 5. The study programs are organized to meet the needs of different categories of students, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Part-time students; o Students with disabilities or undergoing specific challenges; o Students who are already employed; o Mature students are aiming at studying for professional purposes, completing their education, curiosity, self-fulfillment. 6. The institution uses appropriate assessment methods to evaluate students learning experience (theoretical and practical knowledge, transversal skills, etc.), curriculum, and teaching methods. 7. The institution preserves and guarantees the quality of education and provides the necessary facilities for all forms of study: frequency education (full-time), reduced frequency (part-time), and distance learning.
<p>SB3_The institution has the capacity to run the study programs efficiently, in terms of human resources and learning environment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The implementation of the study program is carefully and efficiently planned, and rigorously monitored, while the program content and activities are communicated to students well in advance. 2. The teaching activities are carried out to achieve the study program objectives (e.g., infrastructure, size of groups), using modern teaching methods and adequate IT technologies. 3. The qualifications of teaching staff correspond to the academic requirements of the study program. 4. The teaching methods are evaluated and adjusted on a regular basis. The institution applies internal evaluation methods. The institution analyzes the human, physical, and financial resources for the new study programs (classrooms, laboratories, computers, learning materials, etc.). 5. The institution has set up a teachers' evaluation system that values the quality of pedagogy. 6. The institution ensures new and easily accessible learning resources irrespective of the form of education, and also adequate support to students. 7. The institution provides students with systematic, substantial, and sequential opportunities to acquire essential skills and knowledge, in compliance with study programs objectives. The institution is actively

	engaged in improving the educational process by running surveys among all relevant stakeholders.
SB4_The institution defines clear goals for each study program, which are communicated to students and stakeholders.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The expected learning outcomes correspond to the study level (Bachelor, or Master). 2. The content and the expected learning outcomes of the study program correspond to the study level (Bachelor, Master, Doctoral). 3. The institution sets out the objectives of the requirements of each study program and communicates them to students. 4. The expected learning outcomes have been adequately translated into the educational objectives of the curriculum. 5. The institution uses ECTS, and credit points correspond to the expected learning outcomes and workload of students. 6. The expected learning outcomes are in line with the regional, national, or international perspective of the requirements set by the professional field and the discipline with regard to the contents of the study program. The expected learning outcomes are in compliance with relevant legislation and regulations. 7. The expected learning outcomes are evaluated at the end of each semester, and lead to changes in structure or resources, if appropriate. 8. The curriculum enables students to master research, academic, and professional skills. 9. The teaching-learning environment encourages students to play an active role in the design of their own learning process (student-centered approach).
SB5_The curriculum design, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring, and review processes are in alignment with national requirements and the institution's vision and strategy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professionalism and ethical behavior of human resources are guaranteed at the level of the study program and ensure its successful implementation. 2. The selection and appointment processes of teaching staff are appropriate. Interdisciplinary links with other study programs are taken into consideration. 3. The qualitative and quantitative sufficiency of the equipment and spaces necessary for the successful implementation of the study program are guaranteed. 4. The study disciplines in the curriculum are provided in a logical sequence, clearly define the general and specialized competencies specific to the education field, ensure compatibility with the National Qualifications Framework and similar plans and programs from other European and international states, using the ECTS. 5. The institution complies with the national standards on the approval, monitoring, and periodic evaluation of the study programs and diplomas corresponding to qualifications.
SB6_Admission requirements and student evaluation methods are clear, manageable, and publicly available.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution shall inform the candidates about the access conditions to the study programs and the job opportunities. 2. The institution shall apply in a coherent manner, public regulations, and procedures 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 students about the structure of the study programs, the competences that can be acquired, the education resources, the means of communications, the available facilities (libraries, professional counseling etc.), the forms of evaluation. 4. Admission requirements and student selection procedures correspond to the standards of the study program in agreement with the perspective of the expected learning outcomes.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Information for candidates and for students with disabilities regarding the study program, the educational process, and the support measures shall be published. 6. The institution welcomes and pursues specific policies for the absorption and the integration of new students. 7. The institution has policies, means, and resources to reduce the drop-out rate.
<p>SB7_Mechanisms for student support and counseling are established for successful graduation, the continuation of studies, and career preparation/job placement-orientation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution stimulates the students' contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning by inviting them to conferences, seminars, and other events. 2. The institution fosters communication with alumni and the creation of an alumni community. 3. The institution engages in informing and orientating the students. 4. The institution has established mechanisms for counseling and supporting students. A structure is established to supports students in all cycles of study provided by the institution. 5. The institution has policies and procedures that support students' academic progress. 6. The institution applies traditional and alternative teaching methods, using modern technologies, depending on the interests and the learning capacity of students in order to facilitate their skills acquisition and reduce the drop-out rate. 7. The institution assists and guides students on how to access specialty resources and virtual libraries.
<p>SB8_The institution ensures the inclusiveness of all students admitted.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teaching-learning process takes into account the diversity of students and their needs, providing flexible learning pathways. 2. The 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 innovative teaching methods to ensure quality training, including students with learning difficulties. 4. The institution supports research and the implementation of new learning methods to foster interdisciplinary and flexible learning modes for students to develop transversal skills. 5. The institution has transparently implemented provisions for the promotion of gender equality and equal opportunity for students in difficulty and other vulnerable groups. 6. The institution pursues a policy of support for Roma students, students with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and other vulnerable groups. 7. The institution pursues a policy of support for students engaging in sports activities at high levels. 8. The institution pursues a policy of support for students wishing to pursue part-time or distance-learning studies.
<p>SB9_The institution has a supportive policy for extra-curricular activities and rewards the students' engagement.</p>	<ol 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; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Enhancing teaching and learning; b. Facilitating the preparation of educated and engaged citizens; c. Strengthening students' democratic values and civic responsibility; d. Addressing critical societal issues and contributing to the public good. 3. The institution pursues a policy to facilitate student life.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The institution facilitates the integration of students into the university environment, supporting them in choosing the most appropriate cultural and social options specific to student life. 5. The institution is actively and regularly involved in regional socio-cultural initiatives. 6. The institution supports students engaging in sports activities organized by its structures and other institutions.
<p>SB10_The institution ensures the quality of exchange programs and international mobility (students, teachers, staff) and promotes mobility at all levels. Specific QA mechanisms are in place for mobility.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The study program has a structure linked to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), as well as an assessment system tailored to the form of education, level, and field of study. Students are provided with information about the structure, learning content, and outcomes, didactic methods, forms of assessment, number of credits, etc. 2. The curriculum is consistent with the study program’s objectives. 3. The mobility exchanges, if offered in the study program, should be integrated into the curriculum. 4. The credits awarded in a foreign HEI within the framework of a mutual agreement are transferred without review. 5. The institution promotes exchange programs and international mobility among students, academic and non-academic staff.
<p>SB11_The institution complies with quality indicators specific to joint programs.</p>	<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 institution ensures that a joint Bachelor program would typically require a total of 180-240 ECTS credits. A joint Master's program would typically require 60-90-120 ECTS. The institution monitors the credits and the average time to complete the study program. 3. The institutions agree with foreign institutions on the terms and conditions of the joint program through a cooperation agreement 4. The degree belongs to the higher education degree system of the country in which the institution is based.
<p>B.2 - Learning Outcomes</p>	
<p>SB12_The institution has and uses mechanisms to ensure that outcomes (of learning, employment, and the satisfaction of the different interest groups) can be measured, analyzed, and used for the enhancement of the quality of programs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution has a QA procedure in place, and ensures the quality of the teaching and learning process, regardless of how and where it is offered. Frequency education (full-time), reduced frequency (part-time), and distance learning are clearly integrated into the educational policy and the evaluation system. 2. The institution has developed specific structures, procedures, and resources for reduced frequency, and distance learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Institutional structure specialized in management of reduced frequency education and distance education; o Teaching capacities in relation to the content and distant delivery mode; o Teaching capacities in creating inter-activity amongst students and academics; o Appropriate educational and infrastructure resources (e.g., course support, etc.); o Face-to-face sessions to provide general orientation and introduction to the course materials, guidance for the problematic aspects of the course; revision work to learners; o Quality-ensured examination system. 3. The institution has created specific QA mechanisms for all forms of education (full time, reduced frequency, distance learning). 4. The institution periodically monitors and evaluates the implementation of study programs to ensure that they meet their objectives and the needs of students and society.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The institution has defined indicators to evaluate students on an on-going basis and effectively evaluates learning outcomes. The results achieved are continuously monitored and documented. 6. The institution encourages students to provide feedback through participation in assessing the academic performance of teachers. The students elected in the management structures participate in the design, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring of study programs and educational plans. 7. The quality of study programs is also evaluated by statistics of graduates' employment in relevant fields.
<p>SB13_The institution offers opportunities for the educational and professional needs of any student to follow, abandon, and resume the study programs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Bachelor and Master's degree programs allow a progressive transition from the first to the second cycle, ensuring continuity of training. 2. The degree programs of the first-cycle studies provide students with basic knowledge, general scientific methods, and principles. 3. The institution has appropriate mechanisms and procedures to ensure pathways and recognition of prior learning. 4. The credits awarded in any HEI within the framework of a mutual agreement are transferred without review. The institution provides opportunities to transfer credits awarded in the home country or abroad through the equivalence of parts or complete study programs. 5. The institution ensures that the study programs for reduced frequency or distance learning benefit from access to online platforms and other tools to provide students with a quality education.
<p>SB14_The institution has a clear policy on assessing student achievements (academic, internships, and other learning outcomes gained through the study programs), as well as on transfer of credits so that the assessment is fair, equitable, understandable for students and in line with the pedagogical approach of the institution.</p>	<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 to 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.
<p>SB15_The institution supports projects of pedagogical innovation and excellence in order to improve the integration of graduates and to strengthen the innovation capacity by setting up innovative and employable courses.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution has in place procedures for periodic assessment of teachers' performance, based on clear, transparent criteria. 2. The institution encourages training and promotion of academic staff. 3. The institution engages national and international teaching staff in committees/panels. 4. The institution has in place a support structure to promote continuous teaching training. 5. The institution provides programs to ensure the continuous training of teaching staff. 6. The teaching materials are designed based on modern pedagogical principles (use of digital and communication technologies, experiential teaching methods, etc.). 7. The academic, research, and administrative staff are committed to improving teaching-learning-evaluation processes.

B.3 - Scientific Research Activities	
SB16_The institution ensures that the research projects contribute to and guarantee a high level of scientific quality in a relevant research area.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution promotes a culture of research and ensures that there is a common understanding of the nature, role, and objectives of the research activity. 2. The institution has in place standards, procedures, and processes for the approval of research proposals and theses, and for the supervision of research studies. 3. The institution has in place research policies and ensures adequate infrastructure and resources to facilitate innovative research. 4. The institution has an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the research activities. 5. The institution responds to research ethics requirements.
SB17_The institution ensures the development of research policy at national and international levels through capitalization and dissemination of research results.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution supports and rewards participation in international research. 2. The institution has the ability to create scientific and socio-economic partnerships in order to conduct research in areas of national interest. 3. The institution knows its own human potential, material, and financial resources, as well as the opportunities offered by the 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, useful, and comprehensive strategy for scientific cooperation, aligned with its internationalization strategy.
SB18_Research activities are based on the institutional strategy and a systematic planning process.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research activity is in compliance with the mission and the strategy of the Institution and with the developments and the important issues at the international level. 2. The vision and strategy of the research are elaborated in consultation with the stakeholders of the institution. 3. The priorities of the research activity 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.
SB19_The institution promotes scientific research through the teaching process at study programs level.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution ensures the development of research teams/groups, research laboratories, organization of workshops, the involvement of the students in research activities; participation of staff and students in scientific conferences. 2. The institution ensures the mutual integration of science and education. 3. The institution ensures that the results of the research work are integrated into the learning process. 4. The study programs shall enriched and updated by taking up the results of scientific research. 5. The institution shall ensure the support and updating of the teaching-learning process. 6. The institution encourages the integration of students and doctoral students into research programs.
SB20_The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivize, assess, and reward research engagement.	<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 establishes research structures based on criteria taking into account research priorities, scientific skills, human potential, and infrastructure. 3. 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.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The institution monitors and evaluates the institutional (or faculty or departmental) research policy and strategy. 5. The institution has regulations, tools, and means to support research entities. 6. The institution has a procedure for conducting institutional self-assessment through auditing in order to maintain accreditation through external evaluation. 7. The scientific equipment is shared between the various research entities of the institution. 8. The institution supports and rewards research performance, productivity, and values scientific impact. 9. The institution organizes the evaluation of doctoral studies on a regular basis. The results of this evaluation are the basis of the improvements made. 10. The institution encourages innovation and the emergence of innovative teams and programs. 11. The institution has an internal and external communication strategy that is relevant and adapted to the different target audiences in the field of research. 12. The institution has a policy of promoting and transferring results of research.
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Domain C. - Quality Management

C.1 - Quality Assurance Strategies and Procedures

<p>SC1_The quality management system has a clearly defined structure, objectives, processes, and procedures in order to promote a QA culture.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The QA policies cover all elements of the institutional activities. 2. The QA policies are institutionalized and operationalized into structures and clearly defined through appropriate, effective, and efficient mechanisms and methods. 3. The internal QA system is enforced at all levels across the institution. 4. The institution defines quality standards for its key processes in areas such as teaching, evaluation, research, internationalization, cooperation, and services in the benefit of society. 5. The relevant stakeholders are involved in the design and implementation of QA policies. 6. The institution assesses the effectiveness of planning and evaluation activities on an on-going basis in order to further enhance the implementation of the QA policies. 7. The information gathered from students, alumni, employers, and other stakeholders are used for quality improvement. 8. The institution has clear procedures, known by all academic and administrative staff for key activities/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 substantiate its decision.
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<p>SC2_The institution designs and implements policies with the objective of assuring and improving quality, especially for human resources, learning environment (infrastructures, equipment), and financial resources.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution provides the necessary financial resources in the short and long term based on thorough needs analysis. 2. The institution and its structures (faculties, departments) conduct periodic assessments of governance and management, educational policies, research, internationalization, cooperation, and services for the benefit of the society and make adequate decisions. 3. The institution is systematically concerned with selection, professional development, and training of human resources. 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 activities (access to documentation, infrastructure, etc.) 6. The IT infrastructure is efficiently managed, periodically maintained in good working condition, and updated in line with the latest developments of the IT technologies and media.
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C.2 - Quality of Teaching Staff

<p>SC3_The institution has mechanisms to ensure that the hiring, management, and professional development processes of teaching staff are carried out taking into account the requirements of their corresponding functions.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The institution makes public its organization chart. 2. The institution has a robust, fair, and transparent mechanism for selection of staff. 3. The duties and responsibilities of the personnel correspond to their qualifications and experience. 4. The staff is aware of their tasks and contributes to enhancing the institution's strategy and activities. 5. The number of staff employed is suitable for developing all the institution's current and planned activities, including didactic, research, and administrative activities. 6. The institution follows a training plan according to the priorities defined in the development project. 7. The institution organizes social activities and promotes social dialogue. 8. The institution pursues a policy of life and health insurance. 7. The institution implements an integration policy for its staff.
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Part 2. - Internal Quality Assurance Guidelines

2.1. Introduction

176. 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 publicly 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 newly consistent set of criteria and procedures, at both the institutional and program level, which will put forward the national QA system as a result of its continuous enhancement process started at the beginning of the 2000s. 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.

177. Currently, HEIs in Romania will be subject to a new adaptation of external QA following the spirit of reform that spreads out the EHEA in the last five years. ARACIS will continue to play the significant role in undertaking this process implementing new procedures concerning institutional and program accreditation 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. 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.

178. These Guidelines are 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. 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. 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.

179. 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 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. 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.

180. 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 defined their roles and coordinated IQA processes according to its own autonomy. The objective of the IQA Guidelines is to contribute to providing 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 experience gathered by the Agency and the HEIs for a mature system and according to the stage of development of the national system. 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 at a particular time after ARACIS has overcome its third external review against the ESG coordinated by ENQA.

181. Finally, the new procedure should also demonstrate that the next step in the development of a quality culture in the HE 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 shown 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.

182. 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 social 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. This approach allows the national QA body to focus on the outcomes of the IQA system instead of maintaining the traditional comprehensive scrutiny. This approach turns out to be more efficient for both the HEI and the QA agency and gives the latter the opportunity to focus on more outcome-based accreditation procedures.

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

184. It is not another change of paradigm, as it was in 2005 with the adaptation to the EHEA, but the need to introduce improvements to the system after its first fifteen 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.

185. 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.

186. The Guidelines show the process of adopting an Internal Quality Assurance System by institutions bearing in mind that 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.

2.2. The Purpose and Principles of the Guidelines

187. 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 fulfill.
- The Guidelines are thus likely to need to cover the following issues:
 - ✓ the strengthening and maintenance of the internal QA arrangements within a 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 and 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 applied within the different management models used with HE institutions. These can, for the purposes of QA, be primarily grouped into:
 - ✓ arrangements under which the lead management group maintains 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 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.

188. There may be no need for the Guidelines to be directly involved with matters relating to the development and establishment of 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.

189. In determining where the fundamental 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:

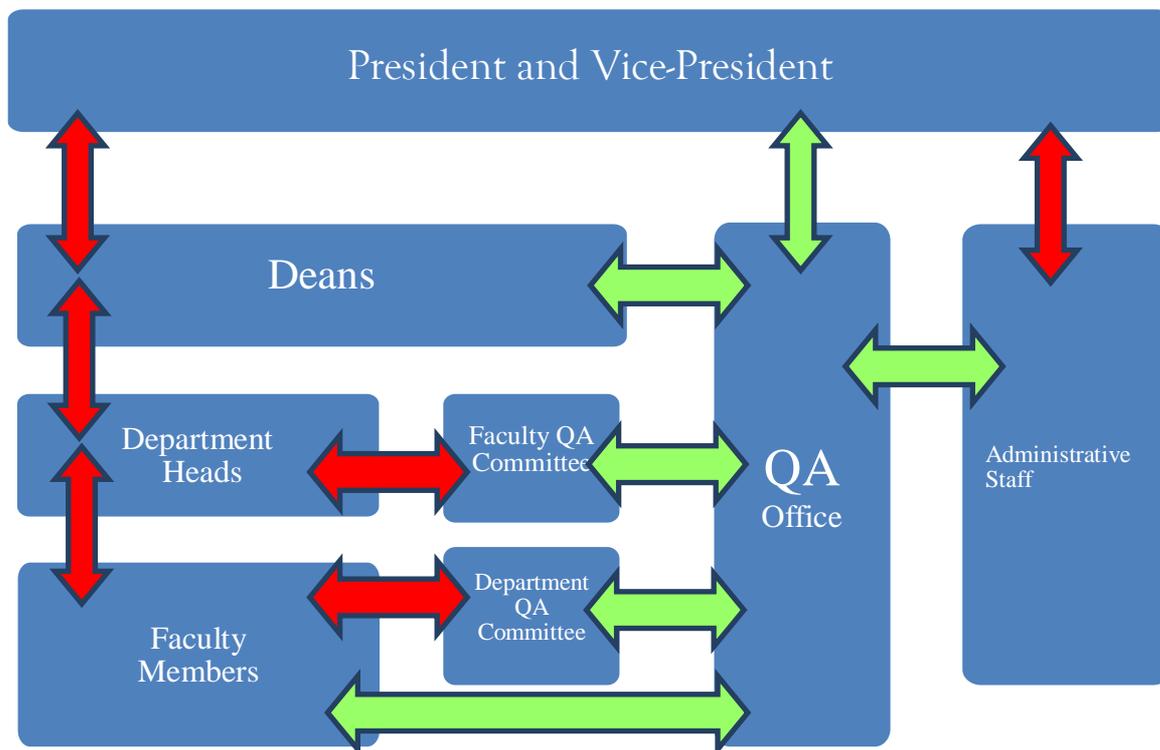
- Is the institution offering the study programs in good faith?
- Does the institution have the resources to offer its program?
- Are its programs designed to meet the outcomes and standards that may be reasonably expected of the program names/titles?
- Do students get a fair opportunity to complete their studies?
- Is the student’s work assessed fairly, consistently and rigorously?

- Do student's achievements match with general expectations associated with the degree/award title?
190. The general principles that underpin all aspects of QA in higher education are that QA should:
- be an integral part of the internal management of the institution, whether explicitly directed 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.
191. The proposed QA guidelines have been developed, considering the following:
- the Guidelines must be applied within the different management models used with HE institutions
 - the Guidelines are developed within the framework of the European Standards and Guidelines for QA of Higher Education
 - the Guidelines must be related to the various external QA procedures that Romanian universities must and opt to fulfill (national or international quality 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.
192. 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. The set of principles underpinning the document is mostly based upon the experience of different European models in developing the procedure on the evaluation of the Internal Quality Assurance Systems.
193. The procedure has been designed from the perspective of the ESG 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 ESG. Therefore, the IQA procedure is designed as a supporting tool for institutions regardless of their own awareness and development of IQA systems but also as a means to comply with the national and international expectations of the individual HEI towards their particular mission and vision.
194. 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 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.
195. The implementation of the IQA system can be modeled 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.

196. 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 support and engagement with all QA activities from planning to implementation actively. Spreading QA culture among all of an HEI's stakeholders is the most significant 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 4 - 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).



2.3. General guidelines for Internal QA

197. 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. 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.

198. 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. But the small set of principles and guidelines underpinning the understanding of IQA in Romania must necessarily be shared and, therefore, agreed on among the national accreditation body, ARACIS (backed by the law and MONE) and the Romanian universities and HE stakeholders.

199. The guidelines are detailed, described as follows:

1. Quality policy and goals.

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

200. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidence 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 fulfillment 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.

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

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

3. The implementation of the programs towards 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.

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

- a) Have information systems that enable it to know and assess its' requirements concerning:
 - Definition of entry/graduation profiles
 - Admission and registration
 - Appeals, complaints, and suggestions
 - Student support and guidance for classroom activities
 - Teaching and assessment of learning
 - Placement/work experience and student mobility
 - 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 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.

203. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidence to:
- a) Have procedures to gather and assess information on its academic staff requirements (job specifications, required competencies, etc.) in accordance with its staff policy.
 - b) Have the means to gather and analyze 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/ must have mechanisms whereby it can design, manage, and improve its services and physical resources²⁷ so that student learning can develop and take place in an appropriate way.

204. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidence 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.

²⁷ Facilities (classrooms, study rooms, computer rooms, laboratories, meeting rooms, library seating), equipment, and scientific, technical, medical care, and artistic material.

- 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 programs delivered by the institution and the social context where it is related.

205. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidence 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 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.

206. In order to implement this guideline in its IQAS, the HEI should explain and provide evidence 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 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 used²⁸ for decision-making and to enhance the quality of degree programs.

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

- a) Have mechanisms to obtain information on the needs and expectations of the different stakeholders in relation to the quality of the programs.
- 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 approaches for enhancing the outcomes.
- e) Determine the various procedures to regulate and assure outcomes-based decision-making processes.
- 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 programs is published periodically.

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

- a) Have mechanisms to obtain information on the running of degrees and programs.
- b) Determine the established procedure for informing stakeholders (including the different levels of the HEI's organizational structure) about:
 - The programs it offers
 - Goals and planning of degrees.
 - Student admission and guidance policies.
 - Teaching, learning, and assessment and evaluation methodologies (including work experience).
 - Mobility.
 - Please, complaints and suggestions.
 - Recruitment, evaluation, promotion, and recognition of academic staff and administration and services staff.
 - Services and the use of physical resources.
 - Teaching outcomes (in terms of learning, graduate employment/labor 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 programs and degrees offered by the HEI.

²⁸ 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.

2.4. Enabling conditions to set up an internal quality assurance system

209. 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.

210. 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, managers, teaching and research staff, and administration and services staff at the institution, education authorities; employers; society.

211. Stages. The design of the internal quality assurance system will include the definition of the stages involved:

- Gathering and analysis of information.
- The control, periodic review, and continuous enhancement of actions.
- The mechanisms and strategies for decision-making, especially those affecting programs of study.
- Accountability to the stakeholders regarding actions carried out, especially those concerning programs of study.

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

Design of the programs offered:

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

Classroom activities and student-orientated actions:

- Student reception and learning support activities
- Development of programs offered
 - Teaching-learning methodology
 - Learning assessment
- Work experience and student mobility
- Careers guidance
- Evaluation and enhancement of the programs 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 programs.

213. 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.

214. Organization, structure, and resources. The HEI must specify the organizational and structural aspects, in addition to the resources that will support and structure the internal quality assurance system. These aspects include:

- Organization chart and structure of the HEI.
- Responsibilities and functions of the administrative and governing bodies, especially those associated with programs 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 programs of study.

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

2.5. Recommendations to implement the IQA Guidelines

216. 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.

217. 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.

218. 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.

219. It is evident 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 extent to which and ways in which individual universities organize their IQA. Yet many, if not most, of the expectations of ESG, are addressed to a greater or lesser extent. It is also notable that these are addressed in continually changing/evolving contexts.

220. Utilizing the evidence base constructed through the previous experience of the HEIs and the ARACIS, 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.

Putting the Internal Quality Assurance System at the center of the new paradigm.

221. 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 center²⁹ 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.

222. 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 recently in the country.

223. 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

²⁹ 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.

the existence of international reports that examine and analyze the system as a whole and propose reforms to it.

224. However, moving to a second level of concretization in the form of indicators and standards requires a process of consultation with the experts involved (especially the representatives of the institutions) in a clearly bottom-up approach that allows ownership of the model by its direct actors and contributes to giving legitimacy to the process based on the co-responsible participation of the experts. This does not imply that the form of the consultation processes, the number of experts convened, the frequency of meetings, and the agenda of the process are not led by the same authority in charge of the reform process.

225. 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. The 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.

226. 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. The primary 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.

227. 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.

Part 3. - The Experts Handbook

3.1. The Experts Committee

Composition of the Experts Committee

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

- The Mission Manager (Member of ARACIS Council)
- Mission coordinator (a member of the ARACIS)
- 2 student evaluators
- Foreign evaluators (a member of the National Register of ARACIS as International Evaluators);
- Institutional Commission evaluator (a member of the Institutional Commission for Managerial and Financial Activities) ;
- evaluators (members of the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators (NRE) in one of the fundamental domains of the HEI);
- Technical Secretary (a member of ARACIS professional staff)

Suggestions to add:

- A labor market expert in the field of interest.
- A chairman who might not be from the ARACIS Council.
- A senior administrative staff (e.g., a General Administrative Director of a University).

229. 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. Nominations are welcomed from institutions across Romania. Student experts may be nominated by student representative bodies or Romanian HEIs. International experts are selected on the basis of nominations from the Romanian HEIs 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) ³⁰

230. The evaluation experts are expected to demonstrate the ability to:

- Evaluate from a different range of perspectives;
- Relate to a range of individuals, including students and senior managers;
- Lead discussions about strategic and operational approaches to the management of quality and academic standards in general, and student learning experience in particular;
- Assimilate a large amount of disparate information and analysis to create sound, reliable, evidence-based conclusions;
- Communicate clearly, orally and in writing;
- Work productively and collaborate in teams to deliver against tight deadlines
- Maintain the confidentiality of sensitive matters.

231. In addition to the competencies required, Romanian academic experts are expected to demonstrate the following experience and knowledge:

- extensive experience of academic management at the institutional level in Romania, preferably relating to QA and enhancement of the student learning experience;
- 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;

³⁰ 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.*

- 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 HE and ARACIS regulations and procedures, as well as the Romanian National Qualification Framework (RNQF).
- Knowledge and understanding of the dimensions of the EHEA as well as developments in QA in distance learning, lifelong learning, and joint programs.

Additional requirements for international experts:

232. In addition, international experts are expected to demonstrate a number of attributes:

- Current or recent (within three years) broad experience of academic management at the institutional level outside Romania, preferably relating to QA and enhancement of the student learning experience;
- Current or recent (within three years) experience of external review of HEIs outside Romania, either as a panel member or through senior involvement with a QA organization;
- Peer-acknowledged expertise in the development of good practice in learning and teaching, and the broader 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 HES within the EHEA.

Additional requirements for student experts

233. ARACIS actively encourages applications from students from all backgrounds and with experience of a wide variety of study modes and levels. The 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) level;
- General awareness of the diversity of the Romanian higher education sector beyond their 'home' institution, and awareness of the arrangements for QA in Romania.

234. The experts' roles

- The expert takes note of all the documentation provided by ARACIS.
- The expert participates in the visits for the evaluation of HEIs, programs, and Doctoral schools. The expert can require, for the evaluation purpose, any document from the institution.
- The expert participates in all the preparatory meetings and details specified in the mission note.
- The expert writes a contribution to the Experts Committee overall report. This contribution is strictly confidential. It is registered in the application of electronic management of documents.
- The expert participates at the visit and other mission meetings.

The mission's manager role

235. The manager, like any other 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 methodology for the institutional evaluation;
- Prepares a draft evaluation report from the oral and written contributions of the experts.

Ethics and confidentiality

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

237. Report to the ARACIS at its designation as an expert, any element 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. 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.

238. 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

239. 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.

240. 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.

3.2. The site visit

The general principles of the site visit

241. ARACIS is responsible for promoting the methodological and ethical principles requested in the context of evaluations in the EHEA. 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. 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.

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

243. The external evaluation must be transparent in its operating rules and encourage dialogue and the co-construction of QA mechanisms within the institution to be evaluated.

244. 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.

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

The analysis of background documents and self-evaluation report

246. 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, as well as students and former students of the program 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.

247. 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 HEI meets the initial accreditation criteria relating to the opportunity of the program, the quality of implementation with the involvement of employers, the robustness of student assessment;
- The ability of the institution to ensure the relevance 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 ENQA³¹, 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

248. 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 program) and reach relevant recommendations.

249. Similarly, the expert is a *critical friend*³² 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.

250. 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;
- Analyze the adequacy of the resources described in the file with respect to the program 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 the program.

251. 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.

252. To ensure the fulfillment 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.³³

253. During the visit, the experts shall collect, evaluate, and communicate information relating to the activity or process under examination with rigor 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.

³¹ *First external evaluations of quality assurance agencies- lessons learned, ENQA Workshop report 10, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2010)*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *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)*

The visit program

254. The Experts Committee, in consultation with the institutions, defines the program of visits. The visit usually lasts between half a day and a day per program. The visit provides an opportunity to meet the institution's management team (director and his or her deputies), the curriculum group, students who are potential candidates for the assessed program, and employers.

255. The visit provides an opportunity for the training program 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.³⁴

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

- 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 in the beginning and 1 hour at the end of the visit);
- Program 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

257. 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.

258. 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.

3.3. Drafting the Expert Committee's Report

Assignment for each expert

259. 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 HEI nor the MONE is aware of it.

260. 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.

261. The evaluation report is structured according to institutional evaluation quality standards. A report template is annexed. 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 for facilitating the drafting of the expert's reports

262. 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. For each quality standard, the expert identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed program. 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?

263. 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 writing. 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.

264. 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 manage 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 recommendations of the ARACIS Council.

Analytical grid for Experts Committees

265. 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. 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.

266. 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
<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 are fulfilled? • Against which criteria? • Which score would you assign? <p><i>Please check consistency of judgment 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>				

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 implements 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
<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 are fulfilled? • Against which criteria? • Which score would you assign? <p><i>Please check consistency of judgment 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>				

The Curriculum				
<p>10. The institution ensures that new and existing programs reflect the needs of society and are continually adapted to societal development and the changing needs of the Romanian and regional and international labor market as well as societal needs.</p> <p>11. The institution ensures that programs have an appropriate level (short cycle/Ba/M/Doctorate, vocational, Life Long Learning), academic content, and an educational quality that supports students' learning and the achievement of program objectives.</p> <p>12. The institution ensures its capacity to run the programs efficiently regarding its human resources and learning environment).</p> <p>13. Clear goals and information are defined for each study program 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 are fulfilled? • Against which criteria? • Which score would you assign? <p><i>Please check consistency of judgment 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

14. The curriculum design, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring, and review processes are in alignment with national requirements and the institution’s vision and strategy.
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, analyzed and used for the enhancement of the quality of programs
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 fulfill the requirements according to their corresponding functions.
17. The institution ensures the quality of exchange programs and international mobility (students, teachers, staff) and promotes mobility at all levels. Specific QA mechanisms are in place for mobility.
18. The institution complies with quality criteria specific to joint programs.
19. The institution offers opportunities for any student’s educational and professional needs to pursue, stop, and resume the study programs.
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 programs) 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.
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.

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

- XXX
- XXX
- XXX

Lack of evidence for these criteria:

- XXX
- XXX
- XXX

Strengths and weaknesses per quality standards or per criteria where possible

- +++
- ----
- +/-

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				
<p>22. The institution ensures that the research projects contribute to and guarantee a high level of scientific quality in a relevant research area.</p> <p>23. The institution ensures the dynamism of national and international development of its research policy as well as the valorization and dissemination of its results.</p> <p>24. There are an institutional strategy and programming of research activities</p> <p>25. The institution promotes research and scientific activity in programs teaching where relevant.</p> <p>26. The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivize, assess and reward research engagement.</p> <p>27. The institution has set up appropriate structures and mechanisms to support, incentivize, assess, reward research engagement and foster the production and valorization 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 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"> • +++ • ---- • +/- 				
<p>Judgement of the expert:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think the quality standards are fulfilled? • Against which criteria? • Which score would you assign? <p><i>Please check consistency of judgment 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>				

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, the continuation of studies and career preparation/job placement-orientation.
- 30. The institution ensures the inclusiveness of any kind of student admitted.
- 31. The institution has a supportive policy for 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

- XXX
- XXX
- XXX

Lack of evidence for these criteria:

- XXX
- XXX
- XXX

Strengths and weaknesses per quality standards or per criteria where possible

- +++
- ----
- +/-

Judgement of the expert:

- Do you think the quality standards are fulfilled?
 - Against which criteria?
 - Which score would you assign?
- Please check consistency of judgment at the end of the report drafting*

Recommendations

- Per quality standards
 - Per criteria
- Please check consistency of recommendations at the end of report drafting*

Glossary

Term	Definition used
Education providing organization	<i>Education providing organization</i> : is an educational 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 the 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	The 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 evaluating 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
<i>Provisional authorization to operate</i>	<p>Temporary 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 that confers the higher education institution or the education, providing the 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 advice 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 advice 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 realizes 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 particular field, which leads to the obtaining of an academic qualification. Study programs are differentiated by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> level of university diploma: license (<i>1st Cycle</i>), master's (<i>2nd Cycle</i>), doctorate (<i>3rd Cycle</i>); form of education: full-time, part-time, distance-learning; field of specialization of knowledge, as per the academic division of learning and with the professional division of labor; duration of studies, respectively the number of the ECTS transferable credits; language of teaching. <p>Study programs are differentiated by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>curriculum</i>, which includes all disciplines that lead to an academic qualification, distributed by year of study, their weight being expressed in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) study credits; <i>discipline/course program</i> or <i>syllabus</i> outlining: the teaching and learning themes and practices associated with teaching, learning, and evaluation, as well as the recommended bibliography; <i>the organization of students and teaching staff</i> for the study program implementation period; 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

Competence makes a difference!

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