

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



Activity Report
Year 2018



ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - **ENQA**

Listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - **EQAR**

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ARACIS

Member of:

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ENQA



Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

CEENQA



International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

INQAAHE



European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

ENAE



Registered in:

European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

EQAR



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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS (in alphabetical order)

ACAD-INO	(EN) The Project “Virtual community for quality assurance and improvement of strategic and innovative management in technical and composite universities to increase the relevance of higher education for the labour market” (RO) Proiectul “Comunitate virtuală pentru asigurarea calității și perfecționării managementului strategic și inovativ în universitățile tehnice și compozite, în vederea creșterii relevanței învățământului superior pentru piața muncii”
ANACEC	(EN) Republic of Moldova’s National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (RO) Agenția Națională de Asigurare a Calității în Educație și Cercetare din Republica Moldova
ANACIP	(EN) Republic of Moldova’s National Agency for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education (RO) Agenția Națională de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Profesional din Republica Moldova
ANC	(EN) National Qualifications Agency (RO) Autoritatea Națională pentru Calificări
ANOSR	(EN) National Alliance of Students’ Organisations in Romania (RO) Alianța Națională a Organizațiilor Studentești din România
ARACIP	(EN) Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (RO) Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Preuniversitar
ARACIS	(EN) Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RO) Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior
ASIIN	(EN) German Accreditation Agency for Engineering Sciences, Computer Sciences, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (D) Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik eV
AUF	(FR) Agence universitaire de la Francophonie
BEx	(EN) Executive Board of the ARACIS Council (RO) Biroul Executiv al Consiliului ARACIS
BFUG	(EN) Bologna Follow-Up Group -BFUG (RO) Grupul de urmărire a procesului Bologna
CE	(EN) Ethics Committee (RO) Comisia de etică
CEENQA	(EN) Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (RO) Rețeaua Central-Est Europeană a Agențiilor de Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior
CNATDCU	(EN) National Council for Certification of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (RO) Consiliul Național de Atestare a Titlurilor, Diplomelor și Certificatelor Universitare
DEQAR	(EN) The Project “Database of External Quality Assurance Reports” (RO) Proiectul “Baza de date a rapoartelor de asigurare externă a calității”
DRIPC	(EN) International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Direction (RO) Direcția Relații Internaționale, Proiecte și Cooperare
EACEA	(EN) Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (RO) Agenția Executivă pentru Educație, Audiovizual și Cultură
EASPA	(EN) European Alliance for Subject-Specific and Professional Accreditation and Quality Assurance (RO) Alianța Europeană pentru Acreditare și Asigurarea Calității în Domenii Specifice și Profesionale
EHEA	(EN) European Higher Education Area – EHEA (RO) Spațiul European al Învățământului Superior - SEÎS

ENAE	(EN) European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (RO) Rețeaua Europeană pentru Acreditarea Educației în Inginerie
ENQA	(EN) European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RO) Asociația Europeană pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior
ENRF <i>FEN</i>	(EN) External Non-reimbursable Funds (RO) Fonduri Externe Nerambursabile
EQAF	(EN) European Quality Assurance Forum (RO) Forumul European în domeniul asigurării calității
EQAR	(EN) European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (RO) Registrul European al Asigurării Calității în Învățământul Superior
ESF	European Social Fund
ESG	(EN) European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RO) Standarde și linii directe pentru asigurarea calității în Spațiul European al Învățământului Superior
ESQA	(EN) The Project "Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities" (RO) Proiectul "Implicarea efectivă a părților interesate în activitățile de asigurare externă a calității"
ESU	(EN) European Students' Union (RO) Uniunea Europeană a Studenților
EUA	(EN) European University Association (RO) Asociația Europeană a Universităților
EURASHE	(EN) European Association of Higher Education Institutions (RO) Asociația Europeană a Instituțiilor de Învățământ Superior
GD <i>HG</i>	(EN) Romanian Government Decision (RO) Hotărârea Guvernului României
GEO <i>OGU</i>	(EN) Romanian Government's Emergency Ordinance (RO) Ordonanță de Urgență a Guvernului României
GO <i>OG</i>	(EN) Romanian Government Ordinance (RO) Ordonanța Guvernului României
INQAAHE	(EN) International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (RO) Rețeaua Internațională a Agențiilor de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior
MC	(EN) Monitoring Committee (RO) Comisia de monitorizare
MICS	(EN) Managerial internal control system (RO) Sistem de Control Intern Managerial
MoESR	(EN) Ministry of Education and Scientific Research (RO) Ministerul Educației și Cercetării Științifice
MoNE	(EN) Ministry of National Education (RO) Ministerul Educației Naționale
MOF	(EN) Official Gazette of Romania (RO) Monitorul Oficial al României
NCPA	(EN) National Center for Public Accreditation (RO) Centrul Național de Acreditare Publică al Federației Ruse
NEL <i>LEN</i>	(EN) National Education Law (RO) Legea Educației Naționale
NOKUT	(EN) The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (RO) Agenția Norvegiană pentru Asigurarea Calității în Educație
OGSG	(EN) Order of the Government's Secretariat General (RO) Ordinul Secretariatului General al Guvernului
OOR	(EN) Organisational and Operational Regulations (RO) Regulament de Organizare și Funcționare

QAFIN	(EN) The Project “Improvement of public policies in higher education and better-quality regulations through updated quality standards” (RO) Proiectul “Îmbunătățirea politicilor publice în învățământul superior și creșterea calității reglementărilor prin actualizarea standardelor de calitate”
QAN	(EN) Quality Audit Network (RO) Rețeaua de audit al calității
QAR	(EN) Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (RO) Revista pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior
QUALITAS	(EN) The Project “Development and strengthening of a quality culture in the Romanian higher education system” (RO) Proiectul “Dezvoltarea și consolidarea culturii calității la nivelul sistemului de învățământ superior românesc”
RNE	(EN) National Evaluators’ Register (RO) Registrul Național al Evaluatorilor
RNE-S	(EN) National Student Evaluators’ Register (RO) Registrul Național al Evaluatorilor - Studenți
SCAP	(EN) Public Administration Strengthening Strategy (RO) Strategia pentru Consolidarea Administrației Publice
TARGET	(EN) The Project ”Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for Institutional Transformation” (RO) Proiectul ”Adoptarea unei abordări reflexive a egalității de gen pentru transformarea instituțională”
UEFISCDI	(EN) Executive Unit for Funding in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (RO) Unitatea Executivă pentru Finanțarea Învățământului Superior, Cercetării, Dezvoltării și Inovării
UNSR	(EN) National Students’ Union of Romania (RO) Uniunea Națională a Studenților din România
USR	(EN) Romanian Students’ Union (RO) Uniunea Studenților din România

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education has continued to carry out the mission it has stated and taken, in line with the responsibilities laid down in the legislation in force on quality assurance in the Romanian higher education system. A summary of the main activities carried out by the Agency in performing its mission is presented in the Report, along the activities conducted in the Agency's capacity as member of significant international organisations and registered in the European Quality Assurance Register - EQAR.

With a view to reaching the agency's main goal and ensuring proper deployment of the external evaluation processes, the report presents the key steps implemented by the agency in solving the current issues concerning the organisation of external evaluation activities after the *External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS* were approved through the Romanian Government's Decision no. 915/14 December 2017, published in the Official Gazette of Romania (MOF) Part I of 11.01.2018. Current evaluations were conducted according to the Methodology approved by GD no. 1418/2006, until full implementation of the requirements under the new Methodology is achieved in the evaluated institutions, over an adequate period of time.

Out of the nine institutional evaluations completed in 2018 in public and private higher education institutions, five were completed with "High degree of confidence" judgments and three with "Confidence" judgments, and one university was proposed for institutional accreditation. These results confirm the findings of 2016 and 2017, according to which the quality level has improved or remained at an acceptable level in this phase of periodical evaluations of higher education institutions. The report gives a detailed presentation of the evaluations of Bachelor's and Master's programmes, and of the evaluations of Master's programme study domains. At the same time, the results of the evaluations of Bachelor's and Master's programmes have largely confirmed an improvement in quality.

ARACIS has done preparatory work in 2018 to initiate evaluation of the third cycle of higher education studies - doctoral programmes - in 2019.

Collaboration with students continued and expanded. Their engagement in the activity of Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions, their participation in the external evaluation visits for the evaluation of Bachelor's study programmes, Master's programmes and institutional evaluation are now fully implemented. Steps were taken to supplement the National Student Evaluators' Register, and ARACIS supported the students' federations in organising and delivering the training sessions.

ARACIS continued to issue publications on the higher education and the external evaluation of the quality of education in 2018 as well. Thus, the following publications were issued in print and in electronic form: *Statistical Data on the Supply and Demand in Master's Programmes - academic year 2017-2018*, and *Statistical Data on the Supply and Demand in Doctoral Programmes - academic year 2017-2018*, and a print of the *Education in Romania - A Century of Evolution*.

Two issues of the *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education* were published in 2018, in print and in electronic form.

ARACIS was active internationally as well; it has participated in actions organised by the ENQA and collaborated with other agencies, structures and organisations in the field of higher education quality assurance, such as the CEENQA, INQAAHE, AUF. Recognition for these activities came through Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică being elected as the President of the Central-East-European Network of Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies - CEENQA, an international regional organisation, and as a member of the ENQA Board.

In 2018, the Agency made all the steps to complete the external evaluation of the Agency's activity, initiated in 2017 and coordinated by the European Association for Higher Education Quality Assurance - ENQA. The visit of the evaluation team, which included David Cairns, Agnes Leinweber, Hannele Niemi, Simona Dimovska (student) was conducted in March 04 – 07, 2018, with the technical assistance of ENQA's Agnė Grajauskienė. ARACIS received the report of the visiting team in May 2018; further on, the Agency had the mission to forward its comments to the ENQA Board. The final report accepted by the Agency is published on the ARACIS web page. After reviewing the report, the ENQA Board decided to maintain ARACIS's capacity as a member of ENQA for a period of five years, which proposal was validated by the General Assembly of ENQA members, sitting in October 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan. The report and the results of the Agency's external evaluation were presented to the EQAR Secretariat on 28.09.2018, within the procedure by which ARACIS requested its registration in the European Higher Education Quality Assessment Register to be continued, which is also a legal obligation for the Agency.

The final decision to continue to have ARACIS registered in the EQAR for a five-year period was made by the Register's Committee in April 2019 and was formally communicated to ARACIS in the same month and subsequently published on the Agency's web page. Given the completion of the ARACIS's external evaluation process in October 2018 and the duration of the EQAR procedures, which required ARACIS to send additional clarifications and information, the annual 2018 report was published in 2019, after the final results of an important activity for the Agency, deployed over a period longer than one calendar year, were received.

The positive results of the external evaluation of ARACIS will be strengthened by implementing a set of measures that will respond to ENQA and EQAR's observations and proposals concerning the improvement of its activity. These measures will be included in ARACIS's Strategic Plan and in the System Procedures, Operational Procedures and other regulations and procedures of the Agency, as applicable.

As it is always the case, the annual report is an opportunity for me to thank everyone who contributed to properly carrying out the Agency's work!

ARACIS President,

Professor Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu

MISSION

ARACIS' mission is to carry out the quality external evaluation of education provided by higher education institutions and by other organisations providing higher education study programmes, which operates in Romania with the aim of:

- certifying, according to quality standards, the capacity of education providing organisations to fulfil the beneficiaries' expectations;
- contributing to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality;
- assuring the protection of direct beneficiaries of study programmes at higher education level by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent and credible information, publicly accessible, about education quality;
- proposing to the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation (at present: Ministry of National Education) strategies and policies of permanently improving higher education quality, in close correlation with pre-university education.

FOREWORD

This report covers the activities carried out by ARACIS in the period between 03.01.2018 – 31.12.2018.

The report was drafted and finalised by a group coordinated by the International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Direction (DRIPC), including representatives of all the structures in charge with decision-making, coordination, execution and control at ARACIS, which informed the report with supporting information and documents presenting the activities carried out, and proposed future measures aimed at improving the internal quality assurance for the agency's activities.

The following contributed to drafting the report, for the respective indicated activities:

Primary reporting and data processing: Ion Tănase, Director, Economic Direction; Carmen Mirian and Mihaela Băjenaru, Service of Speciality Inspectors and Experts Accreditation and Quality Assurance - higher education; Emilia Mircea, Director of Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office; Marinela Lolea, Director, Organisation, Human Resources, IT and Public Procurement Direction; Daniela Stan, Speciality Inspector.

Report analysis: Executive Board of the ARACIS Council: Professor Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu, President; Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Vice-president; Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Director of the Accreditation Department; Lecturer Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu, Director of the External Quality Evaluation Department; Professor Dr. Ioan Ianoș, Secretary General of the ARACIS Council; students Vlad-Valentin Dediu and Petrișor-Laurențiu Țucă, members of the ARACIS Council; Professor Dr. Eng. Anton Hadăr, representative of the largest higher education union organisation in the ARACIS Council; Eng. Dr. Romeo-Cristian Erbașu, employers' representative in the ARACIS Council.

Coordination and final drafting: Professor Dr. Eng. Radu-Mircea Damian, Director, International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Direction - DRIPC; Adina Nică, Expert, DRIPC; Adriana Popoiu, Expert, DRIPC.

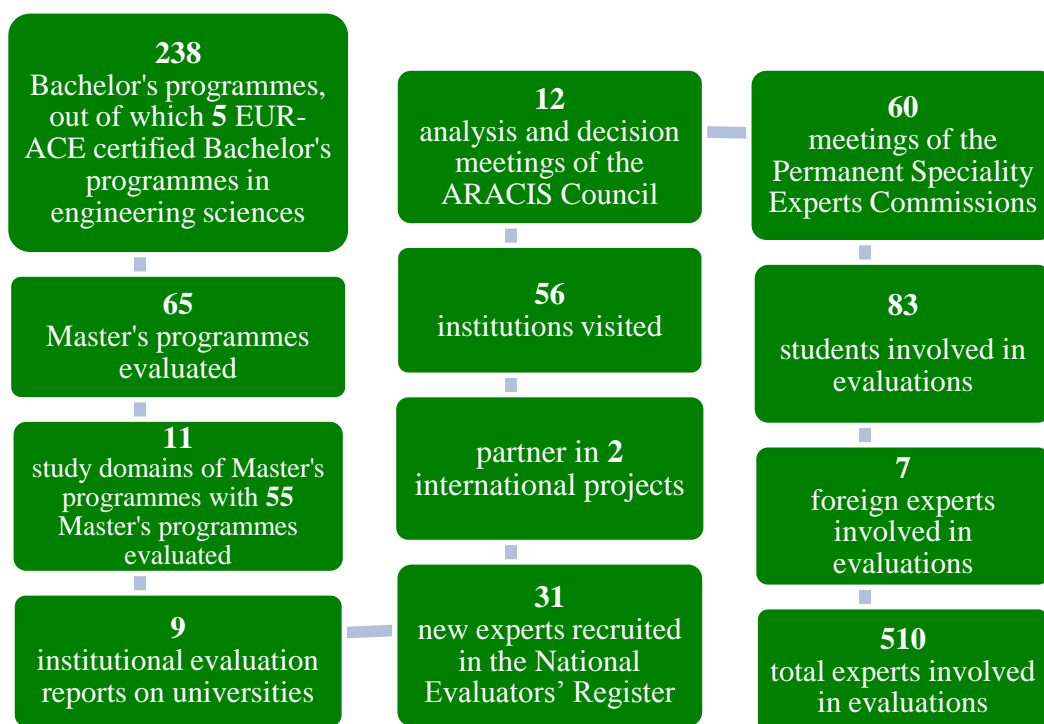
The drafting group thanks all the members of the ARACIS Council and everyone who contributed in producing the final form of this report!

The report was presented and approved in the ARACIS Council.

In its final form, the Report shall be published on the Agency's web page in Romanian and English.

ARACIS ACTIVITY REPORT FOR YEAR 2018

Synopsis of the main education quality evaluation activities conducted by ARACIS in year 2018 in realising its mission



1. GENERAL ASPECTS

1.1 Background, legal framework, organisational structure and resources of ARACIS

1.1.1. Background

As a signatory member of the Bologna Declaration (1999), Romania has become part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which is a vast restructuring process of the higher education system in the signatory states. Ensuring the quality of education is one of the main goals of the EHEA; to this purpose, in 2005, the ministers in charge with higher education have adopted the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area*. These were drafted based on a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE) and the European Universities Association (EUA).

Considerable progress was achieved at European and national level after 2005 in relation to quality assurance and other lines of action within the Bologna Process, such as the framework of qualifications, the recognition and promotion of the using of the results of learning, which all contributed to a paradigm shift towards student-centred learning and teaching.

The **Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ARACIS** was created with a view to evaluating quality assurance in education. The Agency is managed by the **ARACIS Council** (the *Council*).

The Agency operates on the grounds of the provisions of the national laws in force and of the *Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS*, approved by Government Decision (GD) no. 1418/2006, amended by GD 915/2017. The modification was necessary after the ministers in charge with higher education embraced the new *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG* at the Conference in Erevan, Armenia in 2015.

ARACIS is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (**ENQA**) and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this status.

ARACIS is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (**EQAR**) and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this listing.

ARACIS is also a member of other international organisations or networks of higher education quality assurance, and is represented in the management bodies of some of these organisations and networks.

1.1.2. Legal framework

The institutional articles under which ARACIS was established and the activity of ARACIS are regulated at national level through the following normative documents:

- *Emergency Ordinance of the Government of Romania GEO (OUG) no. 75/2005 on assuring the quality of education, as subsequently amended and supplemented;*
- *Decision of the Government of Romania GD (HG) no. 915/2017 modifying the appendix to Decision no. 1418/2006 approving the External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS, further on referred to as the “Methodology”;*
- *GD no. 1731/2006 to approve the tariffs charged by ARACIS for the authorisation and accreditation per study programmes of higher education institutions and for the external evaluation of the quality of education;*
- *The National Education Law NEL (LEN) no. 1/2011, as subsequently amended and supplemented;*
- *GD no. 369/2013 approving the Methodology for accreditation of study subjects for Master’s programmes based on the accredited Master’s programmes;*
- *Orders of the Minister of National Education concerning regulation of and/or capitalisation on some specific evaluation activities are drafted periodically.*

In carrying out its activities, according to the law, ARACIS drafts and uses its own regulations, which are approved by the Council:

- *Guidelines for quality evaluation activities for evaluation of the quality of higher education programmes and higher education institutions;*
- *Guidelines for the periodical external evaluation of the study subjects of Master’s programmes;*
- *Code of ethics and professional conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS in assuring and evaluating the quality of higher education in Romania, further on referred to as the Code of Ethics;*
- *Specific standards for the external evaluation of the academic quality of Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes, used by the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions;*
- *Resolutions of the ARACIS Council and Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council (BEx) to address any current issues.*

According to the provisions of the *External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS*, approved by Romanian Government Decision (GD) no. 1418/2006, amended by GD 915/2017, the „**Methodology**” provides the conceptual framework and describes the main activities and strategies envisaged in the authorisation/accreditation/periodical evaluation processes and the quality assurance and external quality evaluation processes. The operational and instrumental aspects are detailed in the **Specific evaluation guidelines**, further on referred to as the **ARACIS Guidelines** or the **Guidelines**, drafted

by ARACIS in consultation with higher education institutions and other interested stakeholders and beneficiaries. The Guidelines are approved by the ARACIS Council. Depending on the developments concerning the requirements for quality assurance in higher education, the ARACIS Council may approve amendments and supplements to the Guidelines.

ARACIS is a body that is entitled by law to issue and propose opinions and recommendations to the Ministry of National Education, based on its own evaluations and materialising its own know-how/experience in the field; therefore, the ARACIS Guidelines and its appendices are recognised in Romania as specific reference norms and regulations in the field of higher education quality assurance. The *Methodology* and the *Guidelines* ensure alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, further on referred to as the SLDE or the ESG, approved in 2015 at the Erevan Conference by the ministers in charge with higher education in the European Higher Education Area, in which the quality assurance activities, policies and processes are explicitly defined.”

Following some requests received from higher education institutions or other stakeholders, the ARACIS Council approved, in 2018, several punctual modifications of the *Specific standards for external academic quality evaluation in Bachelor's and Master's programmes* of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions.

Concerning **the evaluation of doctoral studies**, in 2018, in compliance with the provisions of the Order of the Minister of National Education, no. 5403/01.11.2018, issued in the Official Gazette no. 962/14.11.2018, ARACIS issued the *Guidelines for external evaluation of doctoral studies*, the *Sheet of the visit for external evaluation of higher education doctoral studies* and other supporting documents for the external evaluation process. The evaluation activity is envisaged to start in 2019.

1.1.3. The aim of the ARACIS activities, according to its mission

According to its mission, ARACIS performs the external evaluation of the quality of the education supplied by higher education institutions and education suppliers operating on the territory of Romania and by Romanian education suppliers that legally operate on the territory of other states, according to the legal regulations in force in Romania, in order to:

- a) certify the capacity of the education suppliers to reach the quality standards and, thus, meet the expectations of their beneficiaries;
- b) contribute to developing an institutional culture of quality in higher education;
- c) ensure the protection of direct and indirect beneficiaries of education programmes by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent, credible, public, accessible information on the quality of the education supplied by higher education institutions;
- d) propose strategies and policies to the line ministry (Ministry of National Education) with the aim to continuously improve the quality of higher education, in close correlation with the pre-university education, the demands of employers, and the European and international practice;
- e) contribute to internationally promoting the high-quality higher education supplied in Romania;

- f) ensure better correlation between the skills demanded on the labour market and the results-oriented education provision, in order to increase employment among new graduates, both nationally and in Europe.

The main goal of the activity of ARACIS in Romania is to ensure high-quality higher education and vocational education, in order to enable the development of competitive human capital.

According to its international status as an EQAR-registered agency, the Agency can also evaluate the quality of education in higher education institutions abroad, upon the request of such institutions, subject to compliance with the legal regulations of that country.

1.1.4. Organisational structure

ARACIS is an autonomous, independent public institution of national interest, a legal entity that runs its own income and expenditure budget. ARACIS is fully funded through its own revenues. In order to organise and achieve better efficiency of its activities, ARACIS has drafted its own Organisational and Operational Regulations (OOR), approved by the Council.

The organisational structure ([Appendix 1 - Organisational structure](#)) of ARACIS includes:

- the Council;
- the Executive Board of the Council;
- the External Quality Evaluation Department;
- the Accreditation Department;
- the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions;
- the Advisory Board;
- the Ethics Committee;
- the Technical Structure, organised on four speciality lines:
 - Quality Assurance Direction;
 - Economic Direction;
 - Organising, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction;
 - International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Direction.
- One compartment and one office subordinated to the ARACIS president:
 - the Public Internal Audit Compartment;
 - the Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office.

The **ARACIS Council** (the *Council*) is composed of **21** members, selected through a public contest according to ARACIS's own procedure that includes professional and scientific competence criteria, professional prestige, etc., out of which: **17** university professors and/or lecturers with full tenure or who continue to teach with the approval of the university senate; **two** students, representatives of nationally representative student federations; **one** representative of the education union organisation and **one** employers' representative ([Appendix 2 – Members of the ARACIS Council \(2018\)](#)).

The *Council* is the collective management structure of ARACIS and ensures the programmatic direction of the Agency. The Council sits monthly in an ordinary meeting, and whenever necessary in extraordinary meetings, convened by the president or the vice president (if the president is absent).

The Council carries out the responsibilities laid down in the ARACIS Organisational and Operational Regulations (OOR).

Two representatives of the students were validated in the ARACIS Council in October 2018, in compliance with the provisions of the Order of the MESR no. 3572, published in the Official Gazette no. 283/27.04.2015 on the Methodology for nominating the representatives of student federations, the representative of the employers and the representative of the higher education union organisation in the ARACIS Council, and with the provisions of art. 6 par. (8) of the OOR, approved by the Council Decision no. 120/ 20.12.2018.

The ***Executive Board of the ARACIS Council*** (BEx) is the operative management structure of ARACIS, composed of the president, the vice president and the secretary general of the ARACIS Council, the director of the External Quality Evaluation Department and the director of the Accreditation Department. The BEx usually sits weekly in ordinary meetings, and whenever necessary in extraordinary meetings, convened by the president or the vice president. The representatives of the student federations in the ARACIS Council and the representative of the education union attend the BEx's periodical meetings as guests.

The ***External Quality Evaluation Department*** and the ***Accreditation Department*** are composed of quality assurance experts - members of the Council; each department is coordinated by a director. These departments sit periodically for analysis and debates on the evaluation of education programmes and institutional evaluations, respectively. As a result of the debates, the departments draft their own reports, submitted to the ARACIS Council, with substantiated proposals concerning the extent of compliance of the evaluated study programmes and higher education institutions with the standards and the quality indicators.

The ***ARACIS Advisory Board*** is composed of important persons of the academia; its mission is to check the evaluation procedures and support the decisions of the Agency ([*Appendix 3 - Advisory Board*](#)).

The Ethics Committee of ARACIS assures compliance with the *Code of Ethics and norms of professional conduct in the Romanian higher education quality assurance and evaluation activities carried out by ARACIS*.

Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions. On the grounds of GD no. 1418/2006, the ARACIS Council decided that *14 permanent speciality experts commissions* should be operational. These commissions are subordinated to the ARACIS Council. The Commissions operate based on the *Regulations concerning the activities of the permanent speciality experts commissions*, approved by the ARACIS Council, and are assisted by a body of ARACIS evaluators who are listed in the ***National ARACIS Evaluators' Register*** (RNE). This body is composed of domestic and foreign university professors and lecturers with recognised professional activities and moral integrity, competence and experience in education quality assurance nationally and internationally. In order to

become RNE-listed evaluators, the candidates undergo a transparent selection process regulated through a public procedure approved by the ARACIS Council.

The **Technical Structure** of ARACIS is an executive structure of 72 staff positions, out of which 33 staffed and 39 vacant positions at the beginning of 2018. According to the provisions of the law, no competition could be organised for the vacancies during year 2018.

1.1.5. The financial activity of ARACIS

According to the laws in force, the revenues of ARACIS are generated from internal sources, such as fees for external authorisation/ accreditation for provisional operation and/or periodical evaluation activities for education programmes and/or institutions, and financial revenues such as interests and external non-reimbursable funds.

For year 2018, the ARACIS Council approved an income and expenditure budget of Lei 16,829,266 for both incomes and expenditure (*Figure 1*), out of which Lei 5,562,946 for incomes and Lei 5,423,529 for expenses under projects funded from external non-reimbursable funds (ENRF).

As of December 31, 2018, the estimated revenues cashed by ARACIS were Lei 9,437,902, out of which Lei 3,078,542 from ENRF, while estimated payments amounted to Lei 10,701,356, out of which Lei 1,927,085 from projects funded from ENRF.

Figure 1 – ARACIS income and expenditure budget for year 2018

Planned 2018 budget	Actual 2018 budget (estimated)
Planned incomes: Lei 16,829,266	Actual incomes: Lei 9,437,902
Planned expenses: Lei 16,829,266	Actual expenses: Lei 10,701,356

These data were established in compliance with the applicable legal provisions in Romania.

As the data presented above indicate, an amount of Lei 7,391,364 of the incomes was not realised, out of which Lei 4,906,960 pertaining to the basic activity and Lei 2,484,404 pertaining to the ENRF (FEN) -funded activity; furthermore, an amount of Lei 6,127,910 of the expenses was not realised, out of which Lei 2,631,466 pertaining to the basic activity and Lei 3,496,444 pertaining to the ENRF-funded activity. The differences between the planned and the realised amounts pertaining to incomes and expenditures under the basic activity are caused by a lower number of evaluation

contracts concluded with higher education institutions, mainly due to the fact that the periodical evaluation of education programmes was carried out within the institutional evaluations, which led to periodical individual evaluations being conducted for a smaller number of education programmes; a smaller number of institutional evaluations carried out and, in some cases, evaluation processes that were not completed by the end of 2018. The differences pertaining to the ENRF-funded activity are caused by the postponement of the implementation deadline for the SIPOCA/SMIS2014:16 project as per the addenda to the funding contract. The financial statements on December 31, 2018 indicate that the funds were managed properly during 2018, according to the law, given the actual circumstances described above.

1.1.6. The juridical activity of ARACIS

In 2018, as a result of the evaluation missions conducted and the enforcement of all legal procedures concerning passing of decisions and granting of judgments, including complaint procedures, ARACIS had to appear in court in some cases, as a result of the complaints of some of the evaluated entities, in order to protect the decisions it had passed.

Thus, ARACIS acted as the defendant in two court cases. The defence pleas were formulated for both cases, in actuality and in law, and denials of claims were formulated and supporting documents enclosed. ARACIS won the two cases on the dockets of the courts, which were heard in 2018.

The evaluation activities conducted in 2018 required a large number of experts to be involved; therefore, 1,715 quality evaluation contracts were concluded with expert evaluators during the year.

43 BEx Decisions and 120 ARACIS Council Resolutions were drafted for year 2018, pertaining to various circumstances and cases. All the BEx Decisions and Council Resolutions have undergone the internal transparency, communication, numbering and archiving procedures.

Furthermore, some template service contracts that ARACIS signs with higher education institutions for the evaluation activities have been drafted and updated. As a result of the changes in the law, the templates of the quality evaluation contracts that ARACIS signs with expert evaluators have been adapted as well.

1.1.7. Internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance includes all the activities carried out by the agency, namely external evaluation activities and professional and administrative activities carried out by the agency's own staff. Procedures were drafted and reviewed in 2018, concerning the internal activities carried out by the agency's organisational structures, as well as procedures that regulate quality assurance in external evaluation processes.

All ARACIS activities are carried out in compliance with the provisions of the Code of Ethics. The Ethics Committee of ARACIS operationally ensures compliance with the provisions of the Code of Ethics.

Through the provisions of its Code of Ethics, ARACIS intends to align to the principles and provisions of the Expert Evaluators' Code of Conduct of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The Code of Ethics is periodically improved; the edition in force is the 3rd edition, revised and supplemented, approved in the ARACIS Council Meeting of September 28, 2017. The Code of Ethics applies to all employees and external collaborators involved in ARACIS's activities.

The *Ethics Committee (CE)* of ARACIS has five members: a *president*, member of the Council, and *four members*, three of which are members of the Council - a teacher, a student and the union's representative, and the fourth is a member of the permanent staff of ARACIS, designated by the ARACIS Council. The Ethics Committee operates on a four-year mandate. The current membership of the Ethics Committee was approved by the ARACIS Council on 25.01.2018.

The Ethics Committee is assisted by a legal adviser who approves its resolutions.

A note regarding a disciplinary offence of an employee of the Technical Staff of ARACIS was registered in the first semester of 2018. A Commission was appointed by Decision of the ARACIS President to analyse a disciplinary offence; after carrying out the investigation and reviewing the submitted documents, the Commission found that the elements required to enforce a disciplinary sanction were not present.

External evaluation activities

External evaluation activities involve members of the ARACIS Council, external evaluators from the categories listed in the RNE, and the Agency's own staff - inspectors and/or speciality experts involved in professional activities that are directly linked to the evaluation process. The ARACIS Advisory Board plays a key role in monitoring compliance with the procedures and ethical norms during the institutional evaluation procedures.

As ARACIS assigns special importance to the compliance with evaluation procedures and ethical norms, the number of registered violations was very small all along the operation of the Agency, and such violations were merely isolated cases. However, a *Note* of the Economic Direction was registered in 2018, concerning a potential breach under the provisions of the Code of Ethics. The Note described certain discrepancies in the reimbursement of some expenses pertaining to an evaluation visit performed by ARACIS to evaluate a Bachelor's programme, which were corroborated with the evaluation documents, the originals of which were received by ARACIS on the morning of the second day of the visit. Thus, although the envisaged period of the evaluation visit was of three days, the dates in the supporting documents submitted for reimbursement of the expenses did not indicate compliance of the expert team/visiting team with the duration of the evaluation period.

The ARACIS management notified the Ethics Committee to investigate the case. The Committee went through all the stages laid down in the Code of Ethics. The suspicion of breach under the provisions of the Code of Ethics targeted the evaluation team, composed of four members: a member from the Permanent Speciality Experts Commission; two members from the National Evaluators' Register; one member from the National Student Evaluators' Register.

After reviewing the submitted supporting documents and hearing the members of the visiting team, the Ethics Committee found that several provisions of the Code of Ethics related to the external quality evaluation of an education programme had been violated. The details of the activity and the conclusions are contained in the documents of the Ethics Committee, which show that the actual working time of the team that visited the university was no longer than six hours, within a period of time that did not match the established schedule.

The draft resolution developed by the Ethics Committee was sent to the persons suspected to have violated the provisions of the Code of Ethics, who were asked to formulate their own views; further on, the documents were forwarded to the BEx and then to the ARACIS Council.

After reviewing the information presented in the Draft Resolution written by the Ethics Committee and after the debates, the ARACIS Council decided to approve the Draft Resolution and established sanctions that were published on the Agency's web page.

Professional and administrative activities

The Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office of ARACIS, through its internal quality assurance component, coordinates and provides logistic support for the current management and internal quality assurance activities, and its overall goal is to establish a culture of quality consciously endorsed by the entire personnel of the Agency.

The Agency implements a quality management system that includes regulations and procedures, as well as persons in charge, decision-making and executive structures, resources, and infrastructure.

By applying the quality management system, the ARACIS management commits to:

- meeting the requests of the stakeholders;
- ensuring the infrastructure and an adequate working environment to enable proper deployment of all processes and resources needed for the goals to be achieved;
- complying with the applicable legislation in force;
- continuously improving the quality management system.

In 2018, the ARACIS management continued to improve the Managerial internal control system (MICS), as per the provisions of GO no. 119/1999 on managerial internal control and preventive financial control, reissued with its subsequent modifications and provisions, and the provisions of the Order of the GSG no. 600/2018 to approve the Code of managerial internal control for public entities.

The following activities were conducted with a view to developing the managerial internal control system:

- materials were drafted to support the implementation of the MICS in the internal structures of the Agency;
- data submitted by the organisational structures within ARACIS were recorded, centralised and processed;
- the Managerial internal control system development programme of ARACIS was drafted;

- the Monitoring Committee (CM) was restructured; the mission of the CM is to create and implement a managerial internal control system at ARACIS to ensure that objectives are achieved in an efficient, effective and economic manner; the CM coordinates the process of updating the goals and the objectives, the procedural activities, the risk management process, the performance monitoring system, the status of the procedures and of the monitoring and reporting system, and the system in place for informing the ARACIS President, according to the law;
- preparing and organising the meetings, drafting the protocols, minutes of the meetings and the Decisions of the Monitoring Committee;
- ensuring technical support for the development of the managerial internal control system.

Two employees of the Organisation, IT, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction attended the accredited “Public Procurement” training in 2018; the purpose for taking this training was to develop the know-how and the practical skills to enable them to correctly carry out their public procurement responsibilities at the Agency. Furthermore, an employee of the Legal and Internal Quality Assurance office took training on civil case law in the legal field.

The ARACIS Council revised a number of internal documents during 2018, such as: *The Agency’s Organisation and Operation Regulations*, *the ARACIS Organisational Scheme* and *the Internal Regulations*. The need to revise the above-mentioned documents came about with some changes in the law, and with the need to align these documents with the existing status quo at the Agency.

Year 2018 was a year of progress in revising and implementing internal quality assurance procedures for the Agency’s activities. However, the implementation of the managerial internal control system is a continuous, long-lasting process and requires comprehensive management instruments to be developed.

1.1.8. Activity of the Public Internal Audit Compartment at ARACIS

No public internal audit missions were organised in 2018, because the two positions at the Public Internal Audit Compartment could not be staffed through a competition, due to the legal restrictions in force. To correct this situation, ARACIS took the necessary steps, in compliance with the provisions of article 14, par. (3) of GEO no. 90/2017 concerning some fiscal and budget measures, modification of some normative documents and prorogation of some terms; namely, it forwarded a Memorandum to the Government to approve competitions or exams to be organised in order to staff the vacant or temporarily vacant positions within the institution; the document was not approved by the Ministry of Public Finance. In such circumstances, ARACIS endeavoured to continue the steps aimed at staffing the two public internal auditor positions in 2019.

1.2 Summary of activities

Management of current activities

During 2018, the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council sat in meetings that were usually organised weekly, and in extraordinary meetings organised whenever necessary. On such occasions,

it reviewed the requests and applications received, and formulated resolutions, which were forwarded directly to the applicants or submitted to the ARACIS Council for review and approval.

In all these cases, irrespective of the form of the requests (letters, e-mail, phone requests, etc.), the responses were formulated within the legal deadline and within the limits of ARACIS's competence.

Two complaints for two Bachelor's programmes were submitted in the reference period. The specific procedure of ARACIS was applied to review and settle the complaints.

Collaboration with higher education institutions and with other interested structures and stakeholders

The Executive Board of the ARACIS Council heard the interested natural entities or the representatives of the interested institutions, such as: rectors of higher education institutions; presidents of associations or foundations; university professors; journalists; students, etc., and provided written answers to the requests of the higher education institutions in Romania or of other people.

In actuality, the entire activity carried out by ARACIS in 2018 was a collaboration between all structures interested in assuring quality in the higher education system in Romania. ARACIS was an active partner of Romanian universities and, through its activities and projects, permanently supported their efforts in the process of assuring and improving quality.

Furthermore, ARACIS continued to cooperate with the Romanian Pre-University Education Quality Assurance Agency (ARACIP), by attending meetings of significance for the educational system in Romania.

Students' involvement

Regarding the activity of students - students were permanently involved and supported by the ARACIS Council, and they participated in the external quality evaluation visits.

Students are full members in the ARACIS Council; they attend the meetings of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council, and participate in all evaluations (institutional evaluations; evaluations of study domains for Master's programmes; evaluations of higher education study programmes) carried out by the Agency.

Following the specific student training activities (four training sessions were implemented in 2018) and based on the information regarding the evaluator student status received from the student federations, the National Register of Student Evaluators (RNE-S) was updated in 2018. The composition of the RNE-S, posted on the web page of ARACIS (<http://www.aracis.ro/organizare/registrul-national-de-evaluatori/>), is periodically updated and supplemented. The students who were members of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions were invited to attend and attended training sessions for expert evaluators, organised by ARACIS in 2018.

Students participated in nine institutional evaluations in 2018, in line with the ARACIS Methodology and Guidelines.

Regarding the involvement of students in the quality evaluation and assurance processes, after revising the ESG in 2015, ARACIS continued to involve students as evaluators in all external evaluation processes. Thus, in compliance with the provisions of the *Procedure for selecting and appointing students, members of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions*, the process of selecting new student representatives in the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions was carried out in 2018.

Involving students in the activities of ARACIS has a remarkable potential for growth; the activity of evaluator students proved that they can be involved in processes for quality assurance in the Romanian higher education at all levels of the process.

Evaluation of the Agency's activity by beneficiaries and other stakeholders

The Agency pays great attention to how it carries out its activities in order to enable continuous improvement of such activities. To this purpose, ARACIS introduced a *Feedback questionnaire* in 2018 to obtain information about how the evaluated institution perceives the Agency's activity. This approach is a continuation of the activities included in the *Barometer of quality in the higher education system*, published by ARACIS in 2015, and intends to identify measures to improve the level of the external quality assurance procedures.

2. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND ARACIS EVALUATORS

As we have shown, approval by the ministers in charge with higher education of the new *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education – ESG 2015* at the Ministers' Conference of Erevan, Armenia, May 14-15, 2015 brought about the need to revise the external evaluation Methodology of ARACIS, approved by Government Decision no. 915/2017 published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 25/11.01.2018.

In revising the Methodology, we also envisaged shifting the focus of the evaluation processes from the entry indicators to a result-based evaluation, with greater accountability created at the level of internal higher education quality assurance structures. In the view of ARACIS, improving the criteria, standards and performance indicators must be a continuous concern and a continuous process. Thus, the implementation of the QAFIN project, conducted with the support of the World Bank, in which ARACIS is a partner, started in 2017 and will serve as additional support in improving the quality of internal and external quality assurance processes. The new methodology implements the provisions of ESG 2015 in the approved criteria, standards and performance indicators, which will continue to be improved through greater involvement of stakeholders from various categories in quality assurance activities.

2.1 Evaluations conducted by ARACIS in 2018

2.1.1 Evaluation of study programmes

In 2018, ARACIS received **341** requests for external quality evaluation services from universities for Bachelor's and Master's programmes, **17** requests for evaluation of Preparatory Romanian

Language for Foreigners Programmes and **five** requests for evaluation of the Psycho-pedagogical Training Programme certifying skills for the teaching profession.

Furthermore, **eight** requests for institutional evaluation were filed.

The process of periodical evaluation of Master's programme study domains was initiated in 2018, and **33** higher education institutions filed requests with the Agency for this type of evaluation, for **261** Master's programme study domains.

In order to respond to these requests, the Accreditation Department of ARACIS operated according to its prerogatives laid down in the OOR, as follows:

- drafting of the internal reports of ARACIS, with support from the staff of the technical structure of ARACIS, for the validation of the results of the programmes' evaluation missions for provisional authorisation, accreditation or continuation of the accreditations;
- organising and managing the database of education programme evaluations;
- management and updating of the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators.

Tables 2.1.1.1 – 2.1.1.2 give a report on the study programmes supplied by universities in Romania, evaluated by ARACIS in 2018. Most of the evaluation activities envisaged accredited study programmes, evaluated periodically to maintain their accreditation. 17.64% of the evaluated programmes were new programmes proposed for provisional authorisation. 2.38% of these did not obtain judgments that would support a proposal for the provisional authorisation approval to be awarded.

Concerning programmes subject to periodical evaluation, the majority of these (99.98%) were able to maintain their accreditation with a "Confidence" judgment, and those evaluated for accreditation obtained accreditation.

Table 2.1.1.1 Report on BACHELOR'S programmes evaluated in 2018 per type of evaluation (Provisional authorisation / Accreditation / Periodical evaluation)

<i>Authorisation – Bachelor's programmes – total = 42</i>	}	TOTAL = 238
<i>Accreditation – Bachelor's programmes – total = 40</i>		
<i>Periodical evaluation – Bachelor's programmes – total = 156</i>		

Table 2.1.1.2 Report on BACHELOR'S programmes evaluated in 2018 per judgment awarded

Bachelor's programmes evaluated in 2018 – full time education (IF)

Authorisation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IF			Accreditation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IF			Periodical evaluation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IF		
Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence
36	1	1	34	-	-	143	3	-
Total = 38			Total = 34			Total = 146		

Bachelor's programmes evaluated in 2018 – **part-time education (IFR)**

Authorisation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IFR			Accreditation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IFR			Periodical evaluation - BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IFR		
Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence
2	-	-	2	-	-	4	-	-
Total = 2			Total = 2			Total = 4		

Bachelor's programmes evaluated in 2018 – **distance learning (ID)**

Authorisation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME ID			Accreditation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME ID			Periodical evaluation - BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME ID		
Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence
2	-	-	4	-	-	6	-	-
Total = 2			Total = 4			Total = 6		

Psycho-pedagogical training programmes for certification of skills for the teaching profession = 8

Preparatory programmes of Romanian for Foreigners = 25

ARACIS solved two complaints in 2018, submitted for two Bachelor's programmes.

2.1.2 Institutional evaluations

Regarding higher education institutions, the state of facts in the national higher education system in 2018 was as follows, in line with GD 158/2018 as subsequently amended and supplemented (academic year 2018 - 2019):

- Public universities: **55** – *underwent external evaluation at least once*;
- Accredited private universities: **38**, out of which **eight** operate in liquidation with all the programmes included in their structure (according to the advises forwarded to the Ministry of National Education subsequent to the ARACIS evaluations), and three are under monitoring procedures based on Orders of the Minister of National Education. *All these universities were evaluated by ARACIS at least once.*
- Private universities authorised for provisional operation: **nine**, out of which **two** operate in liquidation with all the programmes included in their structure (one of these only delivers Master's programmes). Out of these, *three have been evaluated by ARACIS* (the institution that only delivers Master's programmes; one institution for which accreditation was proposed, and one for which ARACIS proposed accreditation not to be granted).

Nine higher education institutions of Romania underwent external evaluation in 2018. *Tables 2.1.2.1 – 2.1.2.2* show details of the institutional evaluations conducted in 2018:

Table 2.1.2.1 Institutional evaluations conducted by ARACIS in 2018, grouped per the judgment obtained

Institutional evaluations conducted in 2018 = 9 universities				
High degree of confidence	Confidence	Limited degree of confidence	Lack of confidence	Institutional accreditation
5	3	-	-	1

Table 2.1.2.2 Programmes evaluated within the institutional evaluations conducted in 2018

Bachelor's programmes evaluated within the institutional evaluations	Full time education (IF)	Part-time time education (IFR)	Distance learning (ID)
TOTAL = 73	71	1	1
Master's study domains evaluated within the institutional evaluations	Master's programmes evaluated within the evaluations of Master's study domains within institutional evaluations		
2	9		

In 2018, at events attended by teaching staff, students, administrative staff, employers' representatives, rectors of higher education institutions, the president of ARACIS handed out the certificates confirming the "High Degree of Confidence" judgment acquired following the institutional evaluations conducted by the Agency in 2017 - 2018.

2.1.3 Evaluation of Master's study domains

Tables 2.1.3.1 – 2.1.3.2 give an overview on the Master's programmes evaluated by ARACIS in 2018:

Table 2.1.3.1 Master's programmes evaluated in 2018 - full time education

Accreditation – MASTER'S PROGRAMME IF			Inclusion in an accredited Master's study domain	
Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Inclusion	Non-inclusion
5	-	-	59	1
Total = 5			Total = 60	

Table 2.1.3.2 Evaluation of master's study domains

Evaluated Master's study domain	Master's programmes evaluated within the evaluations of Master's study domains	Full time education (IF)	Part-time education (IFR)
Confidence judgment with continuation of accreditation	Confidence judgment		
1	19	14	5
1	1	1	-
1	11	6	5
1	1	1	-
1	8	8	-
1	6	5	1
1	3	3	-
1	1	1	-
1	3	3	-
1	1	1	-
1	1	1	-
TOTAL Master's study domains evaluated = 11	TOTAL Master's programmes = 55	44	11

2.2 The ARACIS Evaluators Register

2.2.1 Updating of the National ARACIS Evaluators Register

The National Register of Evaluators - RNE was updated in 2018 and **31** new evaluators were admitted as a result of the specific evaluation procedure. A detailed report on the newly included evaluators, broken down per Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions, is given in *Table 2.2.1.1*.

Table 2.2.1.1 Number of evaluators admitted into the RNE, per Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions

Commission	Number of evaluators admitted in 2018
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	3
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	1
C3 - Legal Sciences	3
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	5
C6 - Economic Sciences I	3
C7 - Economic Sciences II	2
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and	3

Commission	Number of evaluators admitted in 2018
Sports	
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	4
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	3
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	3
C12 - Medical Sciences	1
Total evaluators admitted in 2018	31

In 2018 the Computerisation Compartment created and published **11** online training courses on the aracis.ro platform, with trainees among ARACIS expert evaluators and internal evaluators of the universities. The IT Compartment provided technical support for 2,000 evaluators for the online training platform. The online training taken by expert evaluators is part of their continuous training to enable updating of their know-how on internal and external quality assurance in education (*Table 2.2.1.2*).

Table 2.2.1.2 Total number of trainees (per each training course) who accessed and were trained on the SeECIS (Sistem de eEducație pentru evaluarea Calității în Învățământul Superior din România) platform (Training access log) in 2018

Item no.	Course/Activity	No. of trainees
1	External evaluation of Master's programmes	461
2	Periodical external evaluation of Master's study domains	516
3	Summary of key modifications - External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	434
4	Specific standards for external evaluation of the academic quality of education programmes in the Bachelor's domains pertaining to Speciality Commissions no. 6,7 Economic Sciences I and II	120
5	EUR-ACE certification system for education programmes in Engineering Sciences	130
6	Specific standards for external evaluation of the academic quality of Master's programmes pertaining to Speciality Commissions no. 6,7 Economic Sciences I and II	109
7	Provision of the higher education system versus high school graduates	396
8	Status of implementation of the 2020 Strategy for tertiary education - statistical data for 2016	355
9	Diagnostics of Master's study domains and programmes based on statistical data	370
10	Statistic data on doctoral programmes	450

Item no.	Course/Activity	No. of trainees
11	Specific standards for external evaluation of the academic quality of Master's programmes pertaining to the Speciality Commission for Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	61

2.2.2 Updating of the National ARACIS Student Evaluators Register

The table below shows a report on the student evaluators listed in the ARACIS National Student Evaluators Register:

Table 2.2.2. Number of student evaluators in the RNE-S, per nationally recognised federations

Students federation	Number of student evaluators in 2018
National Alliance of Students' Organisations in Romania (ANOSR)	58
National Students' Union of Romania (UNSR)	78
Romanian Students' Union (USR)	21
Total student evaluators in the National Student Evaluators Register in 2018	157

2.2.3 Updating of the membership of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions

The list of the new members of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions of ARACIS was approved in the ARACIS Council meeting of October 2018. To this purpose, new members selected among the expert evaluators listed in the RNE were recruited through contests in 2018.

As not all the vacant positions in the commissions were staffed after completion of the above-mentioned contest, a new contest was launched in November 2018 to fill these vacancies. The interviews were conducted in December 2018, and the candidates selected in this second stage of the contest are to be validated by the Council in January 2019.

At the same time, the new student evaluators members in these commissions were recruited in the fall of 2018 - one student member in each Permanent Speciality Experts Commission, selected among the students listed in the RNE-S.

2.2.4 Procurement of IT equipment and services

Tender books and/or technical specifications were drafted in 2018 for the procurement of various IT products or services. Thus, the following IT products and services were purchased:

- Software Acrobat Reader Professional - two licenses;
- Accounting software;
- Computer system maintenance services;
- Maintenance services for copying machines.

3. COOPERATION

3.1 National cooperation

Nationally, ARACIS cooperates with **higher education institutions** to fulfil its responsibilities related to the external evaluation of the quality of higher education suppliers, study programmes and Master's study domains, on the grounds of the standards and methodology approved by Government decisions.

Thus, upon the request of higher education institutions of Romania, the *Specific standards for external academic quality evaluation of Bachelor's and Master's programmes* pertaining to some Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions were revised.

Furthermore, ARACIS supported higher education institutions in Romania by organising the event for dissemination of the EUR-ACE® Label certification, in March 2018; the event also hosted the EUR-ACE® Label awarding ceremony for the Bachelor's programmes evaluated by ARACIS that applied for such certification. The event was attended by the acting President of ENAEE, Professor Doctor Eng. Bernard Remaud.

ARACIS representatives also attended the meetings of the **National Rectors' Council** and other national events organised in 2018, where they presented: *The ARACIS external evaluation methodology revised in 2017; the Guidelines for the periodical external evaluation of the study domains of Master's programmes; the Criteria, standards and performance indicators for the evaluation of doctoral programmes etc.*

ARACIS had permanent consultations with the **Ministry of National Education; the National Council for Certification of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU); the Executive Unit for Funding in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI); the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC)** and other institutions in the field of higher education, with the purpose to ensure quality of the higher education system.

3.2 International cooperation

3.2.1 Activities within ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Within the European Higher Education Area, ARACIS is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2009, and it periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this status.

In line with the provisions of the law, the requirement for ARACIS to continue its activity is to maintain its registration in the Agency in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). To this purpose, ARACIS's ENQA membership is a key element in the EQAR

decisions, as this capacity proves compliance with the provisions of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

According to the ESG, agencies must undergo external evaluation at least once in five years to prove that they operate according to these standards. The Agency was evaluated periodically by an international panel coordinated by ENQA (ENQA Coordinated Review) and drafted a Progress Report between two periodical evaluations.

The activities initiated in 2017 were continued in 2018 to ensure proper deployment of the ENQA evaluation of ARACIS.

Thus, the following activities have been conducted:

- The Agency's Self-Assessment Report was completed after ENQA forwarded the results of the preliminary verification of the report and the Agency complemented or modified the report in line with the comments received;
- The external evaluation visit was organised (the schedule of the visit, the list of interviewees, the topics to be discussed and the practical aspects of the visit were established in collaboration with the technical staff of ENQA);
- The visit of the ENQA Evaluation staff took place at ARACIS's premises between March 4-7, 2018; during the visit, interviews were conducted with the ARACIS management and staff and with representatives from: the Ministry of National Education; stakeholders; management teams of some universities; quality assurance structures of universities; ARACIS evaluators; teachers; students, and Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions of ARACIS.

After the external evaluation visit, ENQA drafted the *External Review Report*, which was forwarded to the Agency, initially in its preliminary version, for the Agency to check it and submit its views. The final External Review drafted by the ENQA panel was approved by the ENQA Board in September 2018. Thus, as a result of the external evaluation carried out, and based on the finding that the Agency operates in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), on 13.09.2018, the ENQA Board reconfirmed the capacity of ARACIS as a member of ENQA for the next five years as of the above-mentioned date.

In order to implement ENQA's policy regarding active involvement of agencies in the Association's activities, ARACIS representatives attended the following events organised by the Association in 2018:

- **April 19 - 20**, Zaragoza (Spain) – ENQA Member Agencies Forum (attendants: Iordan Petrescu – ARACIS President);
- **October 18 - 19**, Astana (Kazakhstan) – 9th General Assembly of ENQA (attendants: Iordan Petrescu – ARACIS President, Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică - ARACIS Vice President); Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică was elected on the ENQA Board at this event;
- **November 16 - 17**, Vienna (Austria) – 13th European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF), organised by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), European Students Organisation (ESU), European Universities Association (EUA) and the

European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE) (attendants: Iordan Petrescu, Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică).

3.2.2 Activities at EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ARACIS is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2009 and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for it to maintain this capacity.

In 2018, ARACIS continued the activities initiated in 2017 with a purpose to renew its status as an EQAR registered agency. Based on the External Assessment Report approved by the ENQA Board in September 2018 and sent to EQAR, and based on own reviews, the specialised structure of EQAR (the *Register Committee*) decides on maintaining the registration of ARACIS in the Register. The External Assessment Report was sent to EQAR together with a Substantive Changes Report concerning the Agency's activities and regulations, including details on the evaluation of Master's study domains and the Methodology. EQAR requested some clarifications from the Agency regarding ESG conformity in December 2018, which were sent by ARACIS early in 2019.

The final decision to continue to have ARACIS registered in EQAR for a five-year period was made by the Register Committee in April 2019 and formally communicated to ARACIS in the same month and then published on the Agency's web page.

As part of the collaboration between ARACIS and EQAR, the activities carried out under „The Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR)” project coordinated by EQAR continued in 2018, with ARACIS being one of the partner quality assurance agencies in the project. More details on the DEQAR project are available in *Section 5. Projects*.

3.2.3 Activities within the ENAEE - European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

ARACIS is a member of the *European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education* (ENAEE) and authorised since 2013 by the ENAEE to provide EUR-ACE® Label certification for Bachelor's programmes in engineering accredited under ARACIS evaluations. The external evaluation process conducted by ENAEE started in 2017 and continued in 2018, in order to re-authorise the Agency to provide the certification; authorisation was extended until the end of 2019. The period was later on extended at the meeting of the EUR-ACE Certification Committee of May 20, 2019 to last until December 31, 2022.

EUR-ACE certificates for the programmes evaluated in 2017 were awarded on March 26, 2018 at a large dissemination event attended by the acting president of ENAEE, Mr Bernard Remaud.

Based on the documentation drafted by ARACIS and as a result of the training sessions organised for expert evaluators representing employers (in 2016), five evaluation visits for EUR-ACE® Label certification were conducted in 2018. The list of EUR-ACE certified Bachelor's programmes with certification granted by ARACIS in 2018 and approved by ENAEE is given in *Table 3.2.3.1*.

Table 3.2.3.1

No.	University	Study programme
1	Politehnica University of Bucharest	Robotics
2	Constructions Technical University of Bucharest	Civil engineering (tuition in French)
3		Civil engineering (tuition in English)
4	Transilvania University of Brasov	Road vehicles (tuition in English)
5		Industrial design (tuition in English)

ARACIS was represented every time at the events organised by ENAEE in 2018:

- **March 20**, Paris (France) - General Assembly of ENAEE (attendant: Simona Lache - Director of ARACIS Accreditation Department);
- **April 5 - 6**, Paris (France) - International Symposium on the Bologna process - co-organised by the CTI (Commission des Titres d'Ingenieur) and CDEFI (French Rectors' Conference) (attendant: Simona Lache as guest expert on behalf of ENAEE);
- **May 18**, Zürich (Switzerland) - Meeting of the EUR-ACE Label Committee of the ENAEE (attendant: Simona Lache);
- **November 22 - 23**, Lisbon (Portugal) - General Assembly of the ENAEE and meeting of the EUR-ACE Label Committee (attendant: Simona Lache).

3.2.4 Activities with the CEENQA - Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

ARACIS was represented at the events organised by CEENQA in 2018:

- **May 10 – 12**, Tirana (Albania) - General Assembly of the CEENQA (attendants: Iordan Petrescu – ARACIS President, Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică – ARACIS Vice President). On the occasion of the General Assembly, Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică was elected President of the CEENQA on a two-year mandate;
- **September 26**, Düsseldorf (Germany) - Working Meeting of the CEENQA (attendant: Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică).

3.2.5 Activities with the INQAAHE - International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

Ever since it was established, ARACIS is a member of INQAAHE and participates in the activities of INQAAHE, such as: polls, Newsletter contributions, electing the Network's management etc.

3.2.6 Other international activities

Cooperation with other quality assurance agencies

Within its relations with other quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area, ARACIS continued to be involved in the activities of the **Quality Audit Network (QAN)** informal cooperation network. Mr. Radu-Mircea Damian, Director of the International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Department attended the meeting of the network members in Barcelona, Spain on May 08 - 09, 2018, organising Spain's **AQU Catalunya** quality assurance agency. The topics discussed were quality assurance of research-based higher education; how to simplify re-accreditation; Joint programmes assessment (German approach). ARACIS is the only Eastern-Europe agency member of the QAN (since 2012); the Agency's activity within this cooperation network was continuous and contributed to enhancing the international visibility of ARACIS. In addition, the topics discussed within the QAN are similar to the interests and priorities of ARACIS.

On October 25, 2018, ARACIS and the **Republic of Moldova's National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC)** signed a new Partnership Agreement aimed at promoting high-quality higher education in the two countries and developing the cooperation relations established between the two quality assurance agencies. The partnership agreement was signed on the occasion of the ARACIS representatives' participation at the "Quality assurance of higher education studies: from challenges to future perspectives" seminar organised in Kishinev (Chişinău) on October 25, 2018 by ANACEC and the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova.

The Partnership Agreement was signed as the Republic of Moldova's quality assurance agency was restructured and changed its name from National Agency for Quality Assurance of Vocational Education (ANACIP) to National Agency for Quality Assurance of Education and Research (ANACEC). A Cooperation Agreement between ARACIS and ANACIP had been signed in March 2017; however, a new Partnership Agreement had to be signed following the change of name and the restructuring of ANACIP.

According to the provisions of the Agreement, the ARACIS - ANACEC cooperation is aimed at disseminating experience and good practice in external evaluation of the quality of higher education in the two countries; exchanging information on external evaluation procedures; assigning expert evaluators to participate in the external quality evaluation commissions; participating in joint projects on quality assurance in education; jointly organising events in the field of quality assurance etc.

Under the Partnership Agreement, 13 ANACEC representatives visited ARACIS on November 13, 2018, in a documentation and practice exchange visit where the following topics were approached: ARACIS's higher education evaluation methodology; external evaluation (authorisation/accreditation) of doctoral studies; classification of universities and ranking of study programmes; international recognition of the Agency; examining the possibilities of extending the collaboration between ARACIS and ANACEC, etc.

On another line of international cooperation, on November 9, 2018, ARACIS received the visit of Mr Øystein Lund, Deputy General Manager of the **Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education** (NOKUT). The discussions at the meeting with the ARACIS management focused on aspects such as external evaluations internationally known as *audits* - namely, evaluations that only deal with the institutional framework, with a focus on evaluating the internal quality assurance system through the institution's structures and activities.

Between December 9 – 11, 2018, the representatives of ARACIS (Iordan Petrescu – President, Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică – Vice President) attended the Fifth Global Conference on Quality Assurance of Higher Education (*ASIIN Global Conference on The dawning of a new era of HE quality assurance – what can we expect from the future?*), organised by **Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik eV** (ASIIN) in collaboration with the **European Alliance for Subject-Specific and Professional Accreditation and Quality Assurance** (EASPA) in Berlin, Germany.

The European recognition of ARACIS's activities resulted in invitations received by DRIPC from quality assurance agencies or higher education institutions, to propose expert evaluators as international experts in missions outside the country. Two such missions took place in 2018, with the approval of the BEx, involving evaluators listed in the RNE; the evaluation missions focused on the Biology domain, upon the request of the **National Centre for Public Accreditation** (NCPA) of the Russian Federation, with which ARACIS runs a Cooperation Agreement. In December 2018, the evaluators recommended by ARACIS participated in the evaluation of Biology study programmes at the *Lobachevsky State University Nijni-Novgorod* - Mrs Lucica Tofan (from the Ovidius University of Constanta) - member of the C1 Permanent Speciality Experts Commission of ARACIS, and the evaluation of a group of study programmes in the same domain at the *Belgorod National Research University* - Mrs Cristina Teodora Dobrotă (from the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca) – ARACIS expert evaluator listed in the RNE.

In 2018, DRIPC supplied the data needed for the periodical updating of the information requested by ENQA, EQAR, CEENQA and INQAAHE to ensure the visibility of the member agencies of these organisations and structures.

Activities in the Bologna Follow-Up Group -BFUG

On October 11, 2018, Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, in her capacity as the Vice President of ARACIS and member of the **Bologna Follow-Up Group**, attended the Erasmus+ Key Action 3 Call “Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms” EACEA/35/2018, held in Brussels (Belgium).

As quality assurance is one of the priorities expressed in the Statement of the ministers in charge with higher education in the European Higher Education Area, who met in 2018 at the Conference of Paris, France, the Peer Support Group PS – C Quality Assurance was created under the responsibility of the BFUG to respond to the need to more efficiently implement the requirements of the Bologna process. ARACIS is represented in this Group by Mr Iordan Petrescu – President. At the meeting of the Group in Tbilisi, Georgia, on 3-5 December 2018, Mr Radu-Mircea Damian, Director for International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, was designated to participate on

behalf of ARACIS. The priorities of the Agency and the manner in which it will participate in joint actions with BFUG to implement higher education quality assurance policies were proposed in this context.

4. INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION

The ARACIS web page

The main means of communicating information concerning the activities of ARACIS is the Agency's web page: www.aracis.ro; the page was permanently updated in 2018 with information of public interest concerning the results of the evaluations conducted by ARACIS, the schedule of the external evaluation visits, information about recent developments in the Agency's activities, events organised by ARACIS or other activities such as launches of public consultations.

National press monitoring

Furthermore, in 2018, the International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Direction (DRIPC) of ARACIS monitored communication about ARACIS published in the national press and centralised the papers on higher education published in the online press, which were included in a "Press review" that was forwarded to the members of the ARACIS Council and the Experts and Speciality Inspectors, Accreditation and Quality Assurance Service.

Press releases and news

A number of press releases regarding the activities conducted by ARACIS were drafted and issued to disseminate information to the Romanian public.

Information dissemination activities carried out by DRIPC also had an international component, and paper proposals were sent to CEENQA to be included in the electronic newsletter that this association publishes periodically. Thus, the CEENQA Newsletter of July 2018 included information on the progress in the implementation of the project on "Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating quality standards – QAFIN" (SIPOCA Code 16); the beneficiary of the project is the Ministry of National Education - Unit for Management of Externally Funded Projects and ARACIS is a project partner. Furthermore, the CEENQA Newsletter of December 2018 included mentions of the activity of ARACIS, namely evaluation of doctoral studies, with the following content: „The Romanian Agency for Higher Education Quality Evaluation - ARACIS started to implement the new regulations in evaluating the third cycle as per the Bologna structure - doctoral studies”, and "QAFIN Project – Analysis of the satisfaction of students in Romania - a questionnaire proposed under the QAFIN Project - with the purpose to improve public policies and the quality assurance system".

Subscriptions with international publications

To communicate on the current status and the trends in quality assurance of higher education in Europe and beyond, and to disseminate its own experiences related to the quality of higher education in Romania, ARACIS uses electronic and printed means to disseminate information. Thus, ARACIS has extended into 2018 its subscriptions to *Journal of the European Higher*

Education Area (RAABE publishing house) and *Quality in Higher Education* Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group publishing house).

"Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR)" magazine

In 2018, ARACIS published an issue of the *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR)*. Furthermore, a Call for Papers was launched for the second 2018 issue of the QAR magazine, on the topic of "Recent developments in the evaluation of Master's and Doctoral programmes"; the deadline for the submission of papers was subsequently extended until the end of 2018. Publication was scheduled for the first quarter of 2019, and it contributes to the sustainability of the QUALITAS project, according to the information presented in the next section of the report.

The QAR is an appreciated academic publication that focuses on aspects concerning quality assurance in the higher education system in Romania. The magazine intends to be an instrument to facilitate transfer of practices and communication between internal and external experts, including internationally, and contribute to promoting the development of a quality assurance culture. QAR targets the public interested in the theory, practice and policies in the above-mentioned field.

5. PROJECTS

5.1 National projects - ongoing

5.1.1 The QAFIN project

General presentation

In 2018, ARACIS continued to implement the project on "*Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating the quality standards - QAFIN*" (SIPOCA Code 16); the project implementation period is 29.05.2017 - 28.05.2020.

The beneficiary of the QAFIN project is the Ministry of National Education - Unit for Management of Externally Funded Projects, and ARACIS is a project partner. The project is implemented with the technical assistance of World Bank experts.

The project is co-funded from the European Social Fund (ESF) through the Administrative Capacity Operational Programme 2014 - 2020, Priority Axis 1: Efficient public administration and judicial system, Specific objective 1.1: Development and introduction of joint systems and standards in the public administration to optimise citizen- and business environment-oriented decision-making processes, in line with the Public Administration Strengthening Strategy (PASS).

The general presentation of the QAFIN project and the materials developed and presented on ARACIS's web page in the QAFIN project section, are described below.

Project aim

Achievement and implementation of evidence-based public policies, respectively the correlation of strategic planning with programme budgeting, in the field of financing of higher education institutions, through the enhancement of regulations regarding external quality assurance,

classification and ranking of higher education institutions and study programmes. Also, the project aims at the improvement of administrative capacity of the Ministry of National Education and of ARACIS, by adapting structures, optimizing processes and training human resources, and enhancing the use of transparent public consultation mechanisms that ensure citizen participation in decision-making and by applying European quality standards.

Specific objectives of the project

Objective A) Optimisation of strategic planning and programme budgeting by:

- a. providing the necessary tools, methodologies and guidelines for external quality assurance in higher education, respectively classifying and ranking of higher education institutions and study programmes, for informed decisions regarding the way money is allocated to higher education institutions and to their study programmes;
- b. clarifying the role and mandates of institutions involved in quality assurance processes in higher education.

Objective B) Implementation of the methodology and of the guidelines for classification and ranking of higher education institutions, respectively of study programmes, based on clear and transparent sets of indicators and data.

Objective C) Improvement of the administrative capacity of the Ministry of National Education and ARACIS at system level, by developing managerial instruments on internal organisation and operation, procedures for internal use, manuals, guides of best practices and by training its own staff, as well as staff from higher education institutions for the implementation of the developed instruments and with regard to European practices in the field.

Envisaged results

Result 1 - Methodology and guidelines for external evaluation of quality in higher education institutions from Romania. Implementation period: August 2017 - April 2020.

Activities under this result entail drafting a Revised methodology for the external evaluation of higher education institutions and related management tools, to include evaluation of the three study cycles (Bachelor's studies, Master's studies and Doctoral studies), as well as recommendations for the external evaluation of doctoral studies. World Bank experts have developed a draft of the recommendations on the doctoral studies evaluation methodology, which will be a component of the recommendation concerning the external evaluation methodology.

Activities will also be carried out by engaging seven experts that were selected by ARACIS, who will contribute with proposals, suggestions, revisions, comments on the preliminary versions of the methodology with a view to developing the final form of the document. Furthermore, development of the Methodology will take into account the principles of sustainable development, opportunity and gender equality, and non-discrimination; an expert is selected to this purpose, who will formulate and make an academic presentation of the criteria that relate to sustainable development and gender equality.

Result 2 - Improved methodology for the evaluation of universities with the purpose of institutional classification and ranking of study programmes. Report regarding the classification of universities and ranking of study programmes. Implementation period: August 2017 - July 2019.

Under this result, the World Bank experts drafted a recommendation for the Evaluation methodology for universities, for the purpose of institutional classification and ranking of study programmes - a preliminary version initially, followed by a final version. This activity was carried out with engagement from experts (four experts selected by ARACIS and four experts selected by the Ministry of National Education) who contributed proposals, suggestions, revisions, comments on the preliminary versions of the methodology with a view to developing the final form of the document.

Furthermore, in June 2018, World Bank experts carried out a number of public consultations on the preliminary version of the Methodology; consultations were conducted in five large academic centres (Bucharest (Bucureşti), Timişoara, Iaşi, Cluj-Napoca and Braşov), and were attended by representatives of the universities, the business environment, students, and experts from the Ministry of National Education and ARACIS. An *online Questionnaire* regarding the opinion on the Methodology for the classification of universities and ranking of study programmes was applied later on in order to collect feedback from the stakeholders within the higher education system.

The structure of the platform developed by the World Bank experts under Activity 2.2. *"Development of a computerised module for data entering by universities, in line with the provisions of the methodology, and establishing of the results of the evaluation of universities for the purpose of institutional classification and ranking of study programmes"* includes the following **Zones** and **Partitions**, as follows.

The **public zone** includes the „*Classification of universities*” *Partition* – shaped on the three categories defined by the law for each fundamental subject; „*Profile of universities*” *Partition* and „*Ranking of study programmes*” *Partition*.

The **ARACIS zone** includes a *Presentation of data on the universities*, in line with the updated Government Decision; *Indicators/parameters* – primary data and indicators obtained.

The **university zone** includes general and specific documents, as presented below, and materials developed and presented on ARACIS’s web page in the QAFIN project section:

Methods and criteria for the classification of universities based on statistical data 2017-2018 (CNR meeting - 1-4 of February 2018 - Braşov)

Methods and criteria for the classification of universities based on statistical data 2017-2018 (CNR meeting - 1-4 of February 2018 - Braşov) - Presentation

Draft Methodology for evaluation of universities for the purpose of institutional classification and ranking of study programmes

Draft Recommendation for the Methodology for the Classification of Higher Education Institutions and Ranking of Study Programs

Presentation of Result 2 of the QAFIN Project - Classification of universities and ranking of study programmes (CNR meeting - May 1-2, 2018 - Oradea); Appendix 1. Description of classification and ranking criteria

Final recommendations for the Methodology for the classification of higher education institutions, produced from public consultations

Result 3 - Study on data and good practices in Europe regarding quality assurance and classification in higher education as well as on the impact of current practices at national level.

Implementation period: June 2017 - December 2017.

The study on „Quality assurance in European higher education: Using polarities to compare sound practices in external quality assurance in select systems”, drafted by the World Bank experts as early as the end of year 2017, and the Romanian translation were forwarded at the beginning of 2018. To develop the study, the World Bank experts analysed the country context of the higher education system for each of the systems covered in the study. This research focused on the documents drafted by national and European quality assurance agencies, such as analytical papers, annual reports and self-assessment reports. Concerning the specific research, the World Bank team reviewed documents prepared by those agencies with a view to carrying out the quality assurance procedures. In addition, independent quality assurance experts from the European Union and from other countries of the world were interviewed.

The materials produced are presented on ARACIS's web page in the QAFIN Project section:

Study on good practices in Europe for external evaluation of the quality of higher education institutions

Quality Assurance in European Higher Education: Using Polarities to Compare Sound Practices in External Quality Assurance in Select Systems

Result 4 – Updated internal regulation for the organisation and operation of ARACIS and development of the manual of internal procedures. Implementation period: July 2019 - April 2020.

Result 5 – Drafted Manual of procedures regarding the role and competences of the Ministry of National Education and its subordinated councils, respectively of ARACIS, regarding quality assurance and the ways of collaboration between the two institutions. Implementation period: June 2019 - April 2020.

Result 6 - Staff of the Ministry of National Education and its subordinated councils (CNCS, CNADTCU, CNFIS), of ARACIS and higher education institutions trained on or aware of the implementation of the developed methodologies, including on ensuring adequate sustainability. Implementation period: December 2018 - May 2020.

Result 7 - Staff of the Ministry of National Education and ARACIS to participate in practice exchanges with other higher education quality assurance agencies listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Implementation period: May 2018 - April 2020. Good practice exchanges are envisaged for years 2019 and 2020.

Information dissemination and publicity. An information and communication expert was selected in 2018, who developed the required materials to ensure optimal communication and visibility of the project. Press releases regarding the activities conducted were drafted and published on the QAFIN project web page (<http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qafin/>). Furthermore, information on the progress made in the project was published in the CEENQA Newsletter of July and December 2018, in order to increase the visibility of the project Europe-wide.

5.2 National projects completed - in the sustainability-ensuring period

5.2.1 The *QUALITAS* project

ARACIS implemented the project on „*Development and strengthening of a quality culture in the Romanian higher education system - QUALITAS*” (contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894), in partnership with the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). The implementation period of this project was April 2014 - December 2015.

The **general objective** of the *QUALITAS* project was quality assurance in the higher education system in Romania, by developing an organisational culture focused on continuous improvement of quality in higher education institutions, creating managerial skills at institutional and system level, which are fundamental prerequisites for improving the quality of study programmes and their relevance for the integration on the labour market and for a knowledge-based society.

The project was structured around five working packages, under which all the intended objectives were achieved and a number of publications were developed, which are available on the ARACIS web page related to the *QUALITAS* project: <http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/>.

Actions were implemented in 2018 to continue and strengthen the results of the projects and ensure sustainability; some of the measures taken to this purpose are:

- other materials developed by ARACIS were published in 2018, contributing to ensuring the sustainability of the *QUALITAS* project, namely:
 - *Statistical data on the supply and demand of Master's studies - academic year 2017-2018* (authors: Iordan Petrescu, Emilia Gogu, Ștefan Stanciu, Dorian Cojocaru, Alexandru Chiș);
 - *Statistical data on the supply and demand of doctoral studies - academic year 2017-2018* (authors: Iordan Petrescu, Emilia Gogu, Dorian Cojocaru, Ștefan Stanciu, Alexandru Chiș);
 - *Education in Romania - a century of evolution* (authors: Iordan Petrescu, Emilia Gogu, Constantin Anghelache, Mădălina Gabriela Anghel);
 - *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (Revista pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior)* – issue published in 2018, namely: vol. 8, no. 1, September 2018, on the topic of ”Recent developments in the evaluation of Master's and doctoral studies”; for vol. 8, no. 2/2018, a Call for Papers was launched, with the deadline for submission of papers extended to the end of December 2018, and publication planned for the beginning of 2019;
- support for organising four training sessions in 2018 for student evaluators;
- events organised in 2018 for the dissemination of the EUR-ACE® Label, which also hosted the ceremony for awarding the EUR-ACE® Label certificates for the Bachelor's programmes in Engineering Sciences that requested evaluation, were evaluated by ARACIS and acquired such certification;

- continued collaboration with international expert evaluators selected within the QUALITAS project for the institutional evaluations carried out by ARACIS, etc.

5.2.2 ACAD-INOV project

ARACIS implemented the project on a „*Virtual community for assurance of quality and improvement of strategic and innovative management in technical and composite universities to increase the relevance of higher education for the labour market*” (contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141884), in partnership with four universities of Romania - the Politehnica University of Bucharest, the “Dunărea de Jos” University of Galați, the “Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iași, the “Transilvania” University of Brașov and company S.C. ARWEN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES S.A. (S.C. RED POINT S.A.) of Iași. The ACAD-INOV project was implemented in April 2014 - November 2015.

The **general objective** of the project was to improve higher education management by developing managerial, strategic planning and communication skills in order to ensure quality of education, with a view to improving the relevance of the higher education for the labour market and the knowledge-based society.

As per the funding request, the results of the project were continued and strengthened in 2018, and the sustainability of these results was ensured.

5.3 International projects - ongoing and proposed in 2018

5.3.1 The TARGET project

General presentation

In 2017, ARACIS, in its capacity as a partner, signed the Funding Agreement for the project on “Taking a reflexive approach on gender equality for institutional transformation - TARGET”; the project is funded from European funds under the Horizon 2020 Programme. The project is coordinated by the Institute for Advanced Studies of Austria and implemented over a period of 48 months.

Project aim

TARGET (<http://www.gendertarget.eu>) takes an approach that goes beyond the formal endorsement of a gender equality plan, by enhancing an iterative reflection of the progress made, and by establishing a community of practices to achieve institutional transformation.

The project will initiate institutional change in seven gender-equality-innovating institutions within the Mediterranean area, including research organisations, research funding organisations and a network of universities.

Specific objectives of the project

ARACIS aims to contribute to the development of gender equality in Romania, with the following goals: create an educational environment addressing gender equality in the scientific/research and higher education fields; create the framework for debates, analysis and evaluation in order to plan future strategies that would lead to structural change in gender equality in our institutions; stimulate, strengthen and consolidate social links between the members of the scientific community in order to develop collective consciousness and cooperation in fields of shared interest, with a view to becoming an agent of change in promoting gender equality.

Activities

In 2018, ARACIS organised the first TARGET Institutional Workshop at ARACIS in Bucharest (May 03, 2018); besides ARACIS representatives, the workshop was attended by Mrs Giovanna Vingelli, Professor at the Calabria University of Italy, specialising in Gender Studies, and Mrs Cătălina Radu, professor at the Academy for Economic Sciences of Bucharest, ARACIS expert, Management specialist. The discussion concerned the development of an action plan for promoting gender equality based on a review of the ENQA Guide, which action plan was to be presented at the Milan Workshop in June 25-26, 2018. The plan will be developed to cover a period of one-two years, taking into account the specific context of ARACIS.

The Second Institutional TARGET Workshop (13 July 2018) was also organised in Bucharest and attended by ARACIS representatives and by Mrs Giovanna Vingelli and Mrs Cătălina Radu, and by four representatives of the students. The discussion focused on including gender equality elements in the standards and performance indicators of ARACIS, and breaking down the data collected from institutions based on this criterion, in line with the time frame of the project, starting from resources and continuing with activities, outputs, outcomes and impact.

Envisaged results

Development of the gender equality concept in the higher education of Romania, based on the tradition and experience of the project partners, boosted by the inclusion of specific standards and performance indicators in the ARACIS Methodology.

5.3.2 The DEQAR project

General presentation

The project on a „Database of External Quality Evaluation Reports” is co-funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ Programme, *Key action 3*. The project is coordinated by EQAR, and the project partners are EQAR-listed quality assurance agencies, significant European organisations (including ENQA), and a research partner; ARACIS is one of the partners.

The project's implementation period is 24 months (November 2017 – October 2019). ARACIS was active as a partner in 2018 as well.

Project aim

The aim of the project coordinated by EQAR is to develop a database to improve access to information on higher education institutions/university study programmes that were subject to external quality evaluations, in compliance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The participation of ARACIS in the project, as an EQAR-registered agency, is the result of the Agency's decision to contribute to the internationalisation of the Romanian higher education, by providing full information on the results of the external education quality evaluations that it conducts.

Activities

The DEQAR database is built from the ID of the higher education institutions contained in the ETER (*European Tertiary Education Register*). ETER is an initial database of European higher education institutions, still under construction, created following the initiative of the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission. ARACIS participates in the ETER as a focal point for the National Ministry of Education for Romania, with project management, through the representative of the European consortium implementing the ETER, from the *Università della Svizzera Italiana*, Switzerland.

Based on the options identified at the DEQAR webinar of December 15, 2017, which was the first major event for all partner quality assurance agencies, ARACIS chose to forward the data to EQAR by uploading CSV/XLS files, as the ARACIS database created in Microsoft Office Access enables the data to be directly exported in Excel format.

DEQAR will collect and provide direct access to the reports and decisions of all quality assurance agencies listed in the EQAR, which will contribute to the transparency of the results of external evaluations and facilitate recognition of the higher education qualifications.

The process of actually sending the reports produced following the institutional evaluations carried out in 2013-2018 started in 2018; these were the reports produced following the evaluations of Bachelor's programmes conducted in 2015-2017 and in January-February of 2018, and this activity is ongoing.

5.3.3 ESQA project (proposed in 2018)

General presentation

The project is proposed for funding to EACEA by the Ministry of National Education. The title of the project is **Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities - ESQA**. In this project, ARACIS is a partner in the consortium led by the Ministry of National Education - as the national authority; the consortium includes three European organisations that represent quality assurance (ENQA), universities (EURASHE) and students (ESU), along four other quality assurance agencies from France, Bulgaria, Denmark and the Republic of Moldova. The project was proposed in 2018 to support the *Peer Support Group PS - C Quality Assurance* created by the *Bologna Follow-Up Group* - BFUG to respond to the requirements of the topic concerning

the *Role and involvement of stakeholders in internal quality assurance*, which was identified to require additional activities and clarifications. ARACIS is represented in the PS – C by Mr Iordan Petrescu – President.

Project aim

The project concerns the ways in which involvement of wider categories of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities can be increased, starting by identifying a wider definition of the concept of “stakeholders”, as well as the ways in which their interest to participate in activities for quality assurance in higher education institutions could be encouraged.

Specific objectives of the project

The topic of the project is extremely relevant and up to date for the Ministry of National Education and for ARACIS, given the need to improve the quality of higher education, in correlation with the expectations of the beneficiaries, namely students, employers, and the society as a whole. ARACIS aims at extending the concept of 'stakeholder' and identifying a specific way, in line with the social-economic state of facts in Romania, in which such stakeholders could be involved in the external evaluation process.

Proposed activities

If the project will be approved, it will be carried out until 2020 and include the following main activities: discussions with various categories of stakeholders on their expectations and involvement in external quality assurance; good practice exchanges with other agencies, related to stakeholder involvement; a study at the level of the EHEA on the current state of play in the matter and examples of good practices; the partner agencies, including ARACIS, will participate in joint mutual evaluation activities to identify the strengths and weaknesses in terms of stakeholder involvement in quality assurance; developing and publishing a Guideline covering the role and profile of stakeholders, and including procedures to engage them in external quality assurance, ensure good communication, training needs depending on the profile and the role of various categories of stakeholders. Each partner will analyse how the recommendations of the Guidelines on involving stakeholders can be applied in their own activities and will be able to proceed accordingly to improve stakeholder involvement in quality assurance.

Envisaged results

One significant envisaged result is a strengthened relationship between ARACIS, higher education institutions and stakeholders, based on the experiences of other quality assurance agencies or international organisations with experience and tradition in the field, partners in the BFUG working group and in the proposed project. Thus, in the external evaluations, ARACIS will benefit from the involvement and the professional experience of wider categories of stakeholders.

6. SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ARACIS in 2018

1. The current activity continued in compliance with the regulations in force with a view to carrying out the Agency's mission. *Nine* institutional evaluations were completed in 2018, with

five “High degree of confidence” judgments, three “Confidence” judgments and one proposal for “Institutional accreditation”. Furthermore, **238** Bachelor’s programmes were evaluated in all forms of education (full time, part-time and distance education). The number of evaluations of Bachelor’ programmes completed with a “Confidence” judgment is 223, namely 93.7%. Evaluations of study programmes completed with the same judgments account for 92.3% in 2014, 93.37% in 2015, 86.5% in 2016 and 95% in 2017, according to the Self-Assessment Report presented by the Agency for the ENQA external evaluation. One can conclude that the quality of the study programmes evaluated by ARACIS maintains a relatively constant level, with variations around the average percentage of 91.64 % calculated for the period of 2013-2018, when 2034 Bachelor’ programmes were evaluated.

2. The completion of the external evaluation coordinated by ENQA confirmed that the Agency substantially meets the requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG. Thus, the Agency’s ENQA membership was renewed for a new period of five years. Implementation of the recommendations and comments contained in the ENQA Report (2018) has started: the ARACIS strategy for 2018 – 2021 was published and is available on the Agency’s web page; the Agency’s reports are published on the web page, in a keyword-based searchable format, etc.
3. The ENAEE evaluation continued with a second external visit focused on the evaluation procedures used by the Agency. Following the comments and recommendations, measures were taken to meet the ENAEE evaluation standards for the Bachelor’s programmes in engineering sciences.
4. The EQAR evaluation was successfully completed in 2019 based on the documents submitted by ARACIS; thus, the Agency continues to be registered in the Register for another five-year period.
5. Measures for internal quality assurance continued to be implemented:
 - approved format and manner of receiving the feedback questionnaire from the institutions evaluated by ARACIS;
 - drafted and approved internal system and operational procedures.

The implementation of the provisions of the internal quality system and operational procedures continued. One element that needs to be better regulated is the manner of processing and using the information received in the questionnaires from the universities as feedback on ARACIS’s evaluation activities.

6. Activities continued under the projects where ARACIS is a partner in order to improve and supplement the external evaluation procedures, focusing on the evaluation of the third cycle of university studies (doctoral programmes).
7. The structure of the permanent staff in the Agency’s internal directions and services did not change in terms of the number and the people employed, although this is necessary in some compartments.

8. The financial activity of the Agency was in line with its mission; however, an analysis of the costs of evaluations is necessary, as well as re-correlation with the salary increases as an effect of the changes in the law.
9. The Agency's international visibility has increased, contributing to linking the higher education of Romania to the EHEA, through:
 - participation in the European Commission's DEQAR project;
 - election of Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Vice President of ARACIS, as the CEENQA President and member of the ENQA Board;
 - participation in the ESQA project as partner of the Ministry of National Education, with the goal of achieving greater involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance;
 - continued publication of the QAR, which contains contributions of authors from Romania and from other countries;
 - publication of comprehensive works on the higher education in Romania, including in English.

Therefore, we can state that the quality of the activity of ARACIS improved in 2018; however, this trend must be continuously maintained, based on the society's requirements concerning the quality of higher education, in line with the recommendations of ENQA and EQAR.

7. ARACIS STRATEGY

The *Strategy of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)* for 2018 – 2021 was developed in 2018 and approved by the Council at the meeting held in December 2018. The strategy was drafted in consultation with the members of the Council and with a wide category of stakeholders, taking into account the priorities included in the Agency's Self-Assessment Report drafted for the external review coordinated by ENQA.

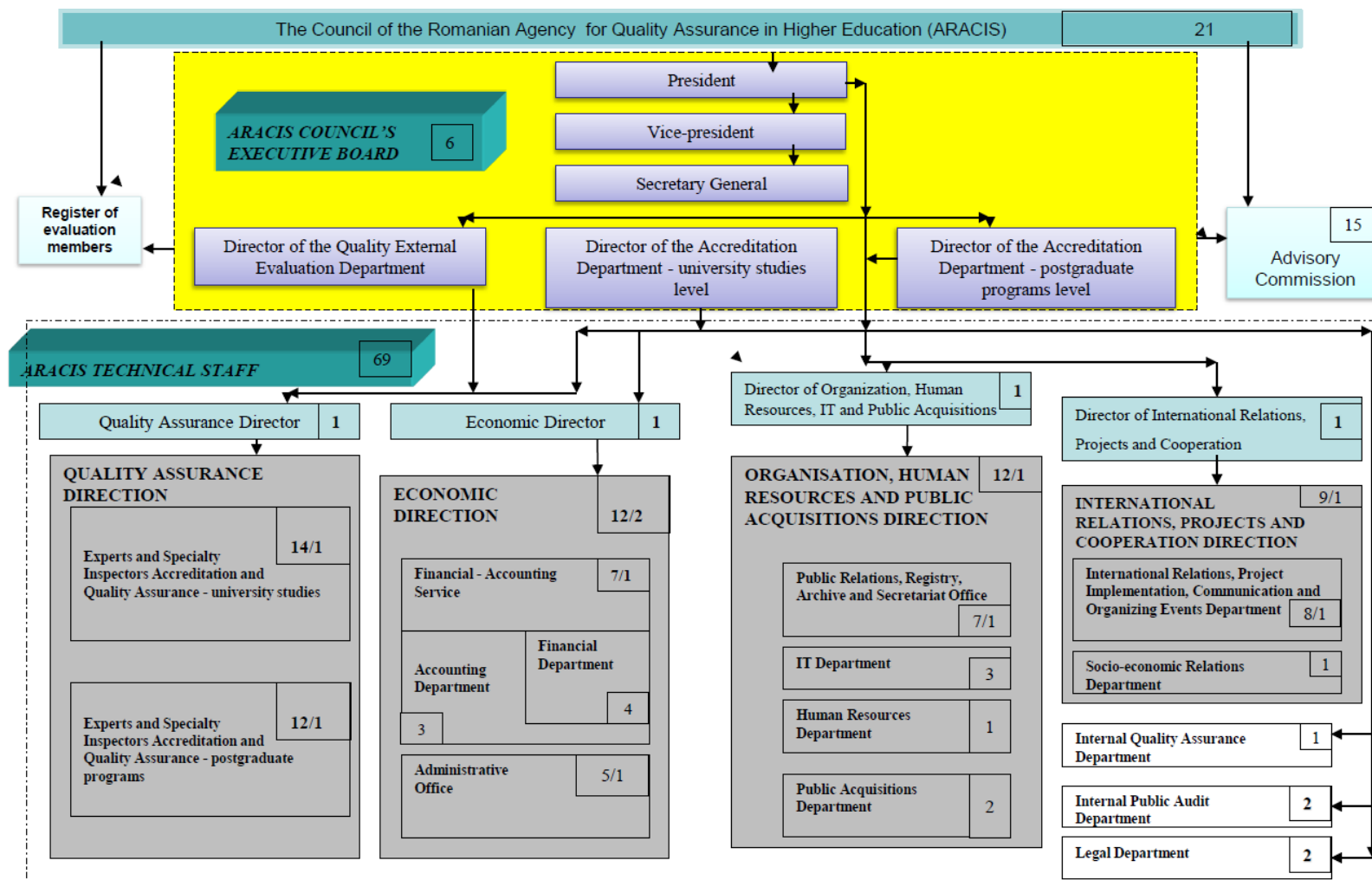
The strategy is available on the web page at

http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/1_Prima_Pagina_web/2019/Strategia_ARACIS_pentru_2018-2021_-_Final_28.01.2019.pdf

APPENDICES

ORGANISATIONAL CHART OF THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION
ARACIS (updated 25.01.2018)

Appendix 1 – ARACIS organisational chart



Appendix 2 – Members of the ARACIS Council (2018)

President:

1. Professor Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu

Vice-President:

2. Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică

Secretary General:

3. Professor Dr. Ioan Ianoș

Head of the External Quality Evaluation Department:

4. Lecturer Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu

Head of the Accreditation Department:

5. Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache

Members:

6. Professor Dr. Eng. Dorian Cojocaru
7. Professor Dr. Nicoleta Corbu
8. Professor Dr. Gheorghe Grigoraș
9. Professor Dr. Eng. Anton Hadăr
10. Professor Dr. Iamandi Luca
11. Professor Dr. Ioan Lascăr
12. Professor Dr. Ladislau Nagy
13. Professor Dr. Nicolae-Adrian Opre
14. Professor Dr. Radu Nicolaie Oprean
15. Professor Dr. Ion Popa
16. Professor Dr. Eng. Neculai Eugen Seghedin
17. Professor Dr. Vasilica Stan
18. Doctor in Engineering Romeo-Cristian Erbașu
19. Vlad-Valentin Dediu– student
20. Petrișor-Laurențiu Țucă– student

Appendix 3 – ARACIS Advisory Board

Academician Ionel Haiduc

Prof. Dinu Airinei - "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi

Prof. Cezar Bîrzea - National School for Political and Administrative Studies of Bucharest

Prof. Oprea Călin – „Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest

Prof. Dumitru Gașpar – “Universitatea de Vest” of Timisoara

Prof. Viorel Lefter – Academy for Economic Sciences of Bucharest

Prof. Mircea Cristel Muthu – „Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Gheorghe Popa - "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi

Prof. Alexandru Popovici – Oil & Gas University of Ploiesti

Prof. Zoltan Rostaș – University of Bucharest

Prof. Gheorghe Solomon – Politehnica University of Bucharest

Prof. Emilian Stancu - University of Bucharest

Prof. Paul Șerban Agachi - „Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Mircea Ivănescu - Craiova University

Prof. Adrian Miroiu - S.N.S.P.A

Prof. Mihai Octavian Popescu - Politehnica University of Bucharest