



THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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

Registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR

Activity Report

of the

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

2015

THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Full Member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ENQA
Registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR

Registered in: Street Spiru Haret no. 12, sector 1, Bucharest, Romania

Correspondence address: Boulevard Schitu Magureanu no. 1, Bucharest, phone +4 021.206.76.00,
fax +4 021.312.71.35

Table of contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	4
FOREWORD	5
PRESIDENT’S FOREWORD	6
ACTIVITY REPORT OF ARACIS FOR THE YEAR 2015	7
1. GENERAL ASPECTS.....	8
1.1 Context, legal frame of operation, organizational structure and resources of ARACIS	8
1.1.1. <i>Presentation of context</i>	8
1.1.2. <i>Legal frame of operation</i>	9
1.1.3. <i>Mission and purpose of ARACIS</i>	9
1.1.4. <i>Organizational structure</i>	10
1.1.5. <i>The financial activity of ARACIS</i>	12
1.1.6. <i>Legal activity of ARACIS</i>	13
1.1.7. <i>Internal Quality Assurance</i>	13
1.1.8. <i>Activity of Internal Audit Department of ARACIS</i>	14
1.2 Synthesis of carried out activities.....	15
2. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND ARACIS EVALUATORS	16
2.1 General aspects of external quality evaluation	17
2.2 Evaluations carried out by ARACIS	18
2.2.1. <i>Evaluation of study programmes</i>	19
2.2.2. <i>Institutional evaluations</i>	20
2.2.3. <i>Evaluation of Master’s Study Domains</i>	20
2.3 Updating of the National Register of Evaluators of ARACIS.....	21
2.4 Updating of National Register of Evaluators Students of ARACIS	21
3. INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY OF ARACIS.....	22
3.1 Activities in ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.....	22
3.2 Activities in EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education	24
3.3 Activities in ENAEE - European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education	25
3.4 Activities in CEENQA – Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education	25
3.5 Participation of ARACIS in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research in the activities of Bologna Follow-up Group.....	25
3.6 Activities in ESU - European Students’ Union	26
3.7 Activities in INQAAHE – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education	26
4. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	26
5. PROJECTS	27
5.1 National Projects	27
5.1.1. <i>QUALITAS Project</i>	27
5.1.2. <i>ACAD-INOV Project</i>	30
5.2 International projects.....	32
5.2.1 <i>IMPALA Project</i>	32
5.2.2 <i>AQUA-TS Project</i>	33
6. COOPERATION	34
6.1. At national level	34
6.2 At international level	34
ANNEXES.....	35

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARACIS	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ARACIP	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Secondary Education
BFUG	Bologna Follow-up Group
BusinessEurope	BusinessEurope is the leading advocate for growth and competitiveness at European level, standing up for companies across the continent and campaigning on the issues that most influence their performance.
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CNATDCU	National Council for Attestation of Academic Titles, Diplomas And Certificates
CPE	Permanent Ethics Commission
EI	Education International
ENAE	European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQANIE	European Quality Assurance Network for Informatics Education
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
FEN	External Non-refundable Funds
GD	Government Decision
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
LEN	National Education Law
MECŞ	Ministry of Education and Scientific Research
OUG	Government Emergency Ordinance
QAN	Quality Audit Network
NRE	National Register of Evaluators
ROF	Regulations for Organization and Functioning
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
UEFISCDI	Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation

FOREWORD

This report was drawn up for the period 05.01.2015 – 31.12.2015 and corresponds to the second year of mandate of the renewed membership of the ARACIS Council, which started its activity in January 2014. The management team of ARACIS and the president have gone through an interim period (17.01.2014 – 19.05.2015), which ended with the competition for the completion of ARACIS Council composition.

The report was drawn up based on the documentation resulted from the activity of all decision-making, coordination, execution and control structures which operate in ARACIS. It was presented and analysed in the Executive Bureau of ARACIS and was approved in ARACIS Council. In its final form, the Report is published on the website of the agency.

PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

This report highlights the activity carried out by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the year 2015.

The year 2015 was very rich in events and extremely diversified activities, all designed to contribute to the organization and functioning of ARACIS and also, designed to contribute to the support of universities in their endeavour to quality assurance. Among the most important activities achieved in this year we can list the following: organization of competition for completing ARACIS Council in the first quarter of this year, carrying out of activities in the two POSDRU projects (QUALITAS and ACAD-INOV) and realization of all activities and scheduled events within them, realization of a number of over 30 institutional evaluations and over 600 evaluations of bachelor's degree programmes, participation in seminars and international conferences in the field etc. Apart from these activities all the current activities of the Agency were carried out (weekly meetings of the Executive Bureau of ARACIS whose purpose is related to the analysis, resolution of various requests and decision-making for different cases and situations in which the Agency is involved, the monthly meetings of ARACIS Council etc.).

The activities and events carried out in the two projects actively engaged the whole staff of ARACIS, and the members of Council and a great part of evaluators, but also the students involved in institutional evaluations. By these two projects, apart from the institutional evaluations, which include evaluations of study programmes, training sessions of evaluators and students were made, quality indicators were drawn up and were correlated with the new ESG standards (2015), *the evaluation of the quality of national higher education system was performed and there were identified the pathways of improvement of quality evaluation and assurance system, the Quality Barometer was drafted, there were accomplished several working meetings or workshops with the participation of evaluators from the National Register of Evaluators and representatives of universities who are involved in internal quality assurance activities etc.*

During the year 2015 we accomplished and/or started a series of activities designed to contribute to the increase of internal quality of activities carried out by the Agency (e.g. revision, updating and completion of Visit Sheet for evaluation of quality for authorization of bachelor's degree programmes, revision, updating and completion of Visit Sheet for evaluation of quality for accreditation of bachelor's degree programmes etc.).

Having in view the large volume of activities carried out during the year 2015 and the involvement of the whole staff and members of ARACIS Council and students, I want to thank them all for the results obtained at the end of this year and I am hopeful for an equally active participation in the activities scheduled for the year 2016.

**President of ARACIS,
Prof. Eng. Iordan Petrescu, Ph.D.**

ACTIVITY REPORT OF ARACIS FOR THE YEAR 2015

Synthesis of activities carried out by ARACIS in the year 2015



1. GENERAL ASPECTS

1.1 Context, legal frame of operation, organizational structure and resources of ARACIS

1.1.1. Presentation of context

Romania, as signatory state of Declaration of Bologna (1999), became part of European Higher Education Area (EHEA), vast reorganization process of higher education in signatory states. Quality assurance in education represents a main objective of EHEA and in this respect, the Ministers responsible for higher education adopted in 2005 the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in European Higher Education Area (EHEA)*. They were drawn up based on a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European Students Organization (ESU), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and European University Association (EUA).

After 2005 we noticed substantial progress regarding quality assurance and in other lines of action from Bologna Process such as the qualifications framework, recognition and promotion of use of learning outcomes, all this contributing to paradigm shift to student-oriented learning and teaching.

Having this context in view, the Ministerial Communiqué of 2012 invited the E4 Group (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE) in cooperation with Education International – EI, which represents the organizations of teaching staff and other employees from the global education systems, BUSINESSSEUROPE and the European Register of Agencies for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EQAR) to prepare an initial proposal for revision of ESG “to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their purpose”.

This step was completed by adoption of *Standards and Guidelines (ESG) reviewed and approved at the Ministerial Conference of Erevan on 14-15 May 2015*. A key objective of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) is to contribute to a common understanding, beyond any frontiers and by all actors involved, of quality assurance regarding learning and teaching. ESG are used by institutions and agencies for quality assurance as reference document for internal and external quality assurance systems in higher education.

In Romania, in order to evaluate the quality assurance of education, **The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)** was founded, which operates based on the provisions of national laws in force and the External Evaluation Methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS, approved by Government Decision (GD) no. 1418/2006.

ARACIS is member with full rights in the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA* and is regularly subject to international external evaluation procedures set out for maintenance of this status.

ARACIS is registered in the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education EQAR* and is regularly subject to international external evaluation procedures set out for the maintenance of this status.

ARACIS is also member in other organizations or international networks of agencies for quality assurance in higher education.

1.1.2. Legal frame of operation

The activity of ARACIS is regulated by the following normative acts:

- **National Education Law no. 1/2011**, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- **Government Emergency Ordinance (OUG) no. 75/2005** for quality assurance of education, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- **Government Decision no. 1731/2006** on tariffs/fees for the conduct of reviews, approving the higher education institutions' study programmes authorization and accreditation fees, and the fees for external evaluation of quality in education of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

In carrying out its activities, ARACIS uses the “External evaluation Methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS”, approved by GD no. 1418/2006 and “Guidelines of evaluation activities of quality of university study programmes and higher education institutions”. Also ARACIS takes as reference the principles and values included in “Code of Ethics and Conduct norms in activities carried out by ARACIS for quality assurance in higher education in Romania and evaluation and for accreditation.”

Following the activities for effective application of “Methodology”, and legislative changes we identified a number of elements aiming at its improvement, resulting from the comments of evaluators, evaluated institutions and ARACIS staff, respectively members of the Council, Commissions of permanent specialty experts and specialty inspectors. The “*Procedure for evaluation of master's degree fields*” was elaborated and in the following period its guidelines for implementation are developed.

1.1.3. Mission and purpose of ARACIS

The mission of ARACIS is to perform the external evaluation of quality of education offered by the higher education institutions and applies to all the organizations providers of education which operate on the territory of Romania and the Romanian organizations providers of education which function legally on the territory of other states, according to the legal regulations in force in Romania and as applicable, from the territory of the state where they operate, with the purpose:

- a) To attest the capacity of organizations providers of education to reach quality standards and thus, to meet the expectations of beneficiaries;
- b) To contribute to development of an institutional culture of quality in higher education;
- c) To assure the protection of direct and indirect beneficiaries of study programmes by production and dissemination of systematic, coherent and reliable public and accessible information, about the quality of education offered by the higher education institutions;
- d) To propose the line ministry (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research) strategies and policies for the purpose of continuous improvement of quality of higher education, in close correlation with the secondary education, with the requests of employers and the European and international practices;
- e) To contribute to promotion of a quality higher education in Romania at international level;
- f) To assure a better correlation between the competences required on the labour market and the education offer oriented to learning outcomes for increasing the degree of occupation of jobs by the new graduates both at national and European level.

The main objective of activity of ARACIS represents the assurance of quality higher education and professional training for the development of a competitive human capital.

1.1.4. Organizational structure

ARACIS is a public autonomous and independent institution, of national interest, with legal personality and with own income and expense budget. ARACIS is fully funded by own incomes. For organization and rendering efficient its activity, ARACIS has elaborated its own Regulations for Organization and Functioning (ROF), which is approved by the Council.

The organizational structure (Annex 1 – Organization Chart) of ARACIS includes:

- The Council;
- The Executive Bureau of the Council;
- The Department for External Evaluation of Quality;
- The Department for Accreditation;
- The Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts;
- The Advisory Commission;
- The Ethics Commission;
- The Technical Department which is structured by 4 (four) specialized divisions:
 - The Quality Assurance Division;
 - The Economic Division;
 - The Organization, Human Resources and Public Procurement Division;
 - The Division for International Relations, Projects and Cooperation
- And two departments subordinated to the President of ARACIS:
 - The Internal Public Audit Department;
 - The Legal Department.

ARACIS Council (or *the Council*) is composed of 21 members selected by public competition according to own procedure of ARACIS, which includes criteria regarding professional and scientific competence, professional prestige etc., among whom: **17** professors and/or senior lecturers, who have full-time appointments (permanent tenure) or who continue their teaching activity with the approval of University Senate; **two** students, representatives of student federations at national level; **one** representative of trade union in education and **one** representative of employers. Any person who fulfils the moral and professional criteria of selection established by procedure and publicly announced can enrol in the competition, regardless of ethnic origin, gender, religion or other criteria which could be discriminatory. The members of ARACIS Council cannot hold public dignity functions or university rector function (Annex 2 – Members of Council). The Members of the Council sign with the Agency a contract for four (4) years (students do not have contract for four years, they are appointed annually).

The Council is the collective management structure of ARACIS, which assures the programmatic orientation of the Agency. It meets every month in ordinary meeting as well as in extraordinary meeting, whenever it is necessary, when convened by the president or of the vice-president, in the absence of president.

The Council fulfils a series of assignments as they were presented in ROF.

The Executive Bureau of ARACIS Council is the operational management structure of ARACIS, composed of president, vice-president, general secretary of ARACIS Council, director of the Department for External Evaluation of Quality and director of the Department for Accreditation.

It meets in ordinary meeting every week as well as in extraordinary meeting whenever it is necessary, when convened by the of president or vice-president. In the regular meetings of the Executive Bureau takes part a representative of students from ARACIS Council.

The Department for External Evaluation of Quality and the **Department for Accreditation** are composed of experts in quality assurance, members of the ARACIS Council, and are coordinated by the directors of each department. The two departments are regularly meeting for analysis and debates regarding the evaluation of study programmes and institutional evaluation. Following the debates the two departments draw up their own reports and forward to the ARACIS Council informed proposals regarding the degree of fulfilment of standards and quality indicators for the study programmes and higher education institutions evaluated.

The Technical Department of ARACIS is an executive structure with 54 positions. In 2015 there were 34 filled-in positions with active personnel. 2 positions were open for competition and were filled.

The Advisory and Audit Commission of ARACIS activity is composed of personalities of academic world and is designed to check and support the decisions of the Agency (Annex 3 – Advisory Commission).

The Permanent Ethics Commission (CPE) of ARACIS is composed of three persons, of whom one president and two members. The records of documents, correspondence are assured by a Commission secretariat, which draws up the minutes of the meetings. The mandate of CPE is for 4 years. The Permanent Ethics Commission ensures the observance of Code of ethics and norms of conduct.

The Permanent Specialty Commissions of Experts. ARACIS Council has established based on GD no. 1418/2006 that a number of *14 commissions of speciality permanent experts* should operate. They are subordinated to ARACIS Council. The Commissions of permanent experts carry out their activity based on *Regulations approved by ARACIS Council* and are assisted in their activity by a body of ARACIS evaluators, who are in the **National Register of Evaluators (NRE)**. This body is formed by university professors and senior lecturers from Romania and abroad, with recognized professional activity and moral integrity, competence and experience in assurance of quality of education at national and international level. In order to become evaluators in the National Register of Evaluators of ARACIS, the applicants go through a transparent selection process which is regulated by a public procedure, approved by ARACIS Council.

The Romanian evaluators (both at study programme level and at institution level) must have the following knowledge and skills:

- global knowledge and understanding of higher education;
- knowledge of quality assurance processes used by higher education institutions;
- knowledge and understanding of the evaluated subject and understanding of learning objectives of programmes;
- knowledge of criteria of subject prepared for programmes in the relevant discipline areas;
- knowledge of self-evaluation and specifications of the written curriculum for discipline area;
- familiarization with comparable curricula and with the standards of distinctions from other institutions;
- familiarization with the academic support strategies and with the functions of academic tutorials;
- familiarization with destination data and employment statistics;
- understanding of reports made by external examiners and internal documentation;

- understanding of admission requirements of curriculum and the skills of interpreting the progress statistics for each stage of curricula, including the withdrawal, transfer and failure rates.

1.1.5. The financial activity of ARACIS

For the year 2015, ARACIS Council approved an income and expenses budget of 25,840,174 lei, both at incomes and expenses (*Figure 1*), of which for projects funded by FEN the amount was 8,218,415 lei. The incomes of ARACIS come from own sources, according to the legislation in force such as the authorization of temporary functioning/accreditation of study programmes, regular evaluation and from financial incomes-financial interests, respectively from external non-refundable funds.

On 31 December 2015, ARACIS recorded incomes received in amount of 11,215,201 lei, of which 1,564,157 lei from FEN, while the effective expenses were in amount of 11,048,782 lei, of which 4,381,851 lei for projects with financing from FEN. The data above was established according to the legal provisions applicable in Romania.

The non-realization of planned income budget and non-realization of planned expense budget were mainly due to reduction of current activity of evaluation of higher education quality, because a number of universities were evaluated by QUALITAS Project. Non-realizations of income and expense budget were noticed also in chapter of projects funded from European non-refundable funds because the implementation team was remunerated with much lower amounts than the budgeted ones, according to the provisions of Law no. 284/2010 for unitary remuneration of the staff paid from public funds.

The economic-financial activity of ARACIS for the fiscal year 1 January – 31 December 2014 was audited by the Court of Accounts of Romania during the period 28 October – 18 December 2015, ending with Control Report of 18 December 2015. From the Report of Court of Accounts and from the Decision of Court of Accounts no. 2/13.01.2016 it results that the activity of ARACIS in the year 2014 was carried out in compliance with legal provisions.

Figure 1 – Income and expense budget of ARACIS for 2015

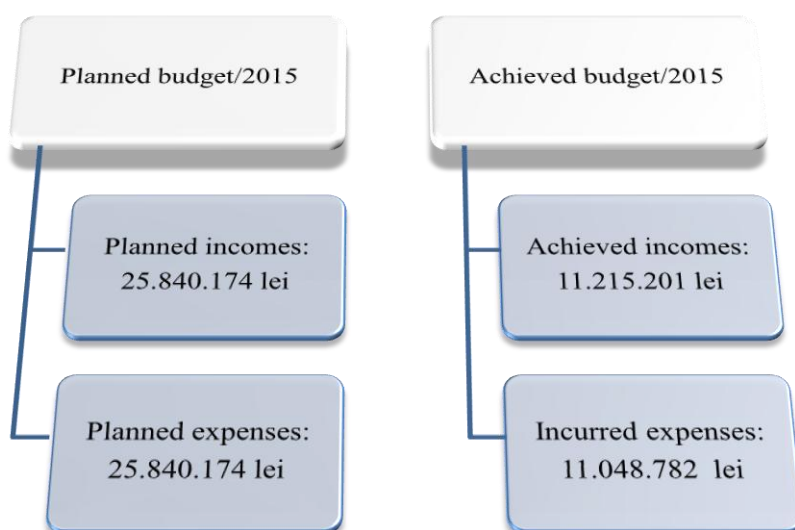
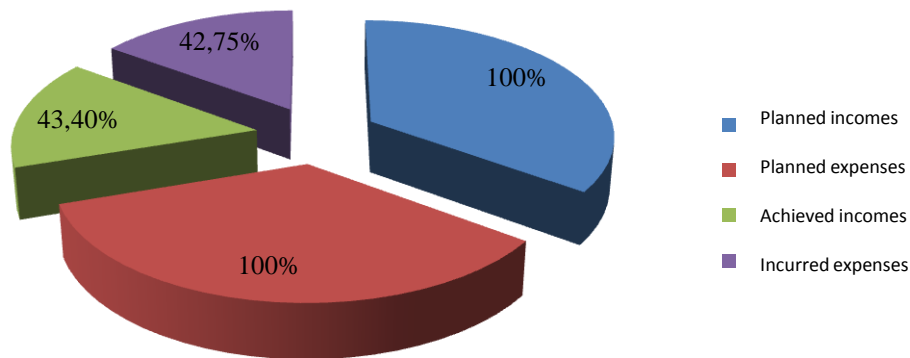


Figure 2 - Realization of income and expense budget of ARACIS in 2015 (%)



1.1.6. Legal activity of ARACIS

In the year 2015, following the evaluation missions achieved, and the application of all the legal procedures regarding decision-making and quality judgements given, including the complaints procedure, in some situations, given the dissatisfactions of those evaluated, ARACIS was faced with the situation of appearing in court for defence of decisions made. Thus, in the 12 complaint files in court, submitted by different universities, ARACIS, by its representatives, filed the defences de facto and de jure, by drawing up statements of defence and enclosing supporting documents. All the cases on the dockets of courts of law in the year 2015 were won by ARACIS.

The evaluation activities performed in the year 2015 required many experts, for this reason a number of 853 Civil Collaboration Agreements were signed with expert valuers. For carrying out the external evaluations, in the year 2015 ARACIS signed with the universities 540 contracts.

For the year 2015 were drawn up 25 Decisions of Executive Bureau of ARACIS Council and 75 Decisions of ARACIS Council corresponding to different situations and causes. All the Decisions of Executive Bureau of ARACIS Council and all the Council Decisions were subject to internal procedures concerning transparency, communication, numbering and archiving.

1.1.7. Internal Quality Assurance

As ENQA Full Member, The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Romania understands the rights and obligations undertaken according to its status. In this respect, ARACIS is constantly preoccupied with internal quality assurance and fulfilment of European standards regarding quality assurance of related activities.

Thus, ARACIS is self-evaluated every year and is regularly evaluated externally by teams of international experts in coordination of ENQA. The next external evaluation of ARACIS will be finalized in the year 2018.

As we presented in the first chapter of this report, ARACIS is an independent and autonomous organization and has clearly defined its mission, purpose and objectives and they are found in the public documents of the Agency. By its current activities, in the year 2015, ARACIS fulfilled the objectives scheduled for the realization of its mission. In the activity carried out (authorization of study programmes, accreditation, institutional evaluation etc.), ARACIS acted based on own Methodology and own procedures, which are public and known by all the parties involved in quality assurance of higher education. The activity of ARACIS and its outcomes are recognized by the interested parties (MECŞ, higher education institutions, employers, public etc.).

For the realization of quality assessment activities, ARACIS collaborates with experts who come from all the universities from the country, included in the National Register of Evaluators Experts (NRE) and who went through a transparent selection procedure, for registration in NRE, procedure which includes criteria regarding personal expertise, integrity and professional ethics. The participation in selection for registration in NRE is a personal commitment of each expert, and ARACIS uses for this purpose an electronic platform which allows for the participation of the candidate expert in a two stage online evaluation. Thus, the quality of experts is a permanent and constant preoccupation of ARACIS.

For the continuous training of experts, in the year 2015 ARACIS organized the online course “Master Procedures” in which 833 users participated (external and internal evaluators). This course was carried out in the sustainability stage of the project “eEducation System for evaluation of Quality in Higher Education of Romania (SeECIS)”, project implemented by ARACIS during the period October 2011 – May 2013, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund by the Operational Programme “Increasing Economic Competitiveness”.

In evaluation of institutional quality, the Agency collaborates with foreign experts. In the year 2015, a number of **23 foreign (international) experts** participated in institutional evaluations made by ARACIS. Also ARACIS involves students in the quality evaluation activities, whose selection is made by the student organizations and their representatives. In the year 2015, a number of **53 students** participated in the institutional evaluation commissions, students who attended training programmes and were evaluated.

The quality assessment activities made by ARACIS experts are completed with detailed reports and synthetic reports, public documents, which can be read and/or downloaded from the website of the Agency. For the evaluation of study programmes, the visit commissions draw up the “Visit Sheet”, together with a series of annexes, representing documents in which the observations of expert Evaluators are written down on the occasion of visits. The reports (are drawn up, apart from the visit sheets, on the occasion of institutional evaluations) are related to what the commissions of expert evaluators found in the institutions, depending on the type of evaluation, about the correspondence between what the institutions claim to fulfil from the point of view of standards and quality indicators and what turns out to be relevant and confirm the internal quality assurance performance, according to ARACIS Methodology. Those reports make the object of analyses and decisions regarding the authorization/accreditation and quality judgments which are given. Also, the reports represent documents which serve to the settlement of complaints or disputes

1.1.8. Activity of Internal Audit Department of ARACIS

During the year 2015, according to the needs identified, the following audit missions were organized:

- Internal public audit mission concerning the “activities from the legal and contentious field in the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education”;
- Internal public audit mission concerning “the procedure of selection and appointment of external evaluation experts and the role of organizational structures involved from ARACIS”.

Following the audit mission of Court of Accounts for the period October-December 2015 there was decided on an implementation plan of measures until 30.06.2016.

1.2 Synthesis of carried out activities

The Executive Bureau of the Council met in ordinary meetings 34 times. On these occasions they analysed the requests and claims received and formulated resolutions which were transmitted directly to petitioners or subjected them to the analysis and approval of ARACIS Council.

In all these cases, regardless of the form of requests (letters, emails, telephone requests etc.), the replies met the legal deadline and were drafted within in the limit of ARACIS competences.

In 2015 some complaints were submitted by a few higher education institutions evaluated (public and private universities) which were aimed at the outcomes of certain evaluations. For analysis and settlement of complaints, as applicable, the specific procedure of ARACIS was applied.

Also, during the year 2015, the Executive Bureau of ARACIS met with the rectors of higher education institutions, presidents of associations or foundations, university teaching staff, journalists, students etc. and replied in writing to the requests of higher education institutions from Romania.

The whole activity carried out by ARACIS in 2015 represented the collaboration between all structures interested in quality assurance in higher education of Romania. ARACIS was an active partner for the Romanian universities, by constantly supporting, by the activities and projects carried out, their efforts in the quality assurance and improvement process.

Also, ARACIS continued the cooperation with ARACIP, by presentation of common proposals of projects and by participation in a series of meetings with impact on the Romanian educational system.

As regards the activity of students, they were permanently involved and supported by ARACIS Council, and participated in external quality evaluation visits. At their request, the Agency provided technical and material support for the training of student evaluators, including by organization of a training session of student evaluators within the „QUALITAS” project in March, at “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacau. Following these actions the National Register of Student Evaluators (NRE_S) was updated, whose structure, posted on the website of ARACIS (<http://www.aracis.ro/en/organisation/national-register-of-evaluators/>) is regularly updated and completed. In this training session 70 students were trained for participation in institutional evaluations carried out by ARACIS.

The students are members with full rights in ARACIS Council, participate in the meetings of the Executive Bureau of ARACIS and in all the institutional evaluations carried out by the agency.

In the year 2015, students participated in a number of 38 institutional evaluations, of which 17 were carried out within the “QUALITAS” Project.

From the point of view of involvement of students in the quality evaluation and quality assurance processes, after the adaptation of ESG, in May 2015, ARACIS continued the steps for involving students in all the external evaluation processes. Thus, four representatives of students participate in the meetings of permanent specialty commissions (Engineering Sciences I and II, Social sciences, political sciences and communication sciences, Agricultural sciences, forestry and veterinarian medicine). The involvement of students in the other specialty commissions is scheduled to be made in the year 2016, by involvement of student federations which have students registered in NRE-S.

As for the involvement of students in external evaluations of university study programmes, ARACIS will adopt supplementary measures so that the role of students is active not only in institutional evaluations, but also in evaluations of study programmes.

The involvement of students in the activity of ARACIS has a special growth potential, as the activity of student evaluators proves that they are able to manage also other types of evaluations and to be involved in the quality assurance processes in Romanian higher education at all levels.

2. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND ARACIS EVALUATORS

The approval by the ministers responsible for higher education in the Ministerial Conference of Erevan, Armenia, 14-15 May 2015, of the new “*Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in higher education*” – ESG 2015, required the necessity of elaborating a new External Evaluation Methodology.

The Methodology is in process of elaboration based on the recommendations made in the studies regarding the impact of current practices at national level in the field and the situation, trends and good practices at European level.

According to the Press Release of Erevan (2015, p. 2-3), the national policies in the field of higher education will have to integrate at least four objectives (adequate to specificity of current period): a) strengthening the quality and relevance of learning and teaching; b) strengthening of employability of graduates across their work life; c) increasing the inclusion degree of national higher education systems; d) implementation of structural reforms agreed.

By consultation of all the relevant institutions and correlation of standards with the European guidelines, together with the experience accrued by applying the current methodology and data obtained from the external evaluation processes which took place, a methodology adjusted to national and European current requirements will be elaborated. Now, after the evaluation of all higher education institutions and study programmes from their structure, ARACIS has enough data and experience to elaborate a new Methodology which aims, apart from the assurance of minimum levels, at development of internal procedures for monitoring of services offered for the purpose of permanent improvement of their quality.

The instrument developed will have in view the shift of focus of evaluation processes from the entry indicators to an evaluation based on process outcomes, with the greater responsabilization of internal quality assurance structures in higher education.

The regulation of qualifications, achieved in the national system, implies the standardization of outcomes, competences specific to specializations and fields of studies. Such a measure aims at institutionalization of learning/training outcomes of comparable study programmes, belonging to different suppliers, with the purpose of increasing the predictability and convergence of expectations between suppliers, beneficiaries, employers, regarding the competences and learning

outcomes produced, for the benefit of citizens. Thus, we will aim at increasing the relevance of study programmes, respectively the increase of employability and professional integration of higher education graduates, thus meeting naturally the expectations of citizens, graduates and their families, but also the business environment.

By the Ministerial Conference of Erevan, it becomes obvious that universities have to reconsider and rebuild their position, not only at social national level, but also European level. Thus, the responsibility of universities for the quality of graduates is highlighted. The point of interest is represented especially by the supply of graduates who hold those cognitive capacities which allow them to have a higher employability degree during their work life. It is emphasized more pronouncedly than in other situations the approach oriented to the capacities and cognitive skills of diploma holders, not the approach oriented to the number of diplomas, and from this point of view the creation of classes of universities depending on the mission undertaken and the human and material resources offered becomes a priority.

2.1 General aspects of external quality evaluation

The external evaluation of academic quality is performed in the following cases:

- a) for the provisional authorization of a study programme to operate (programme authorization) or a provider of higher education (institutional authorization); institutional provisional authorization for a higher education institution is granted by the MEN on the basis of a minimum number of study programmes with provisional authorization to operate, according to the law;
- b) for the accreditation of a study programme (programme accreditation) or of a higher education institution (institutional accreditation);
- c) for periodic evaluation, at five-year intervals, of academic quality of education and research services from an accredited university and/or study programmes.
- d) external evaluation of master's degree fields

For this type of evaluation the methodology is in process of elaboration. In the year 2014 it was approved the Specific Procedure for Periodic External Evaluation of Accredited Master's Degree Fields. For this type of evaluation the methodology is in process of elaboration. The evaluation of master's degree fields responds to the wish of universities for flexibilization of training offer by 2nd cycle of university studies, to meet the requests of employers. These activities continued in the year 2015.

The provisional authorization to operate (to function) of study programmes and/or institutional authorization are the first stage of accreditation procedure and represent the result of external evaluation by ARACIS based on the self-evaluation report proposed by the applicant. The provisional authorisation to operate (function) is the act which confers the higher education institution or the organization provider of education the right to carry out the educational process and to organize, as applicable, the admission in a study programme. The provisional authorisation to operate (function) of a study programme is granted based on the favourable approval of ARACIS (or another agency registered in EQAR), by Government Decision, initiated by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research.

Accreditation is proposed and granted based on the outcomes of external evaluation process carried out by ARACIS (or by another agency registered in EQAR), as recognition of academic quality of a higher education institution or an organization provider of education which was

authorized to operate temporarily and which fulfils the minimum requirements of standards and performance indicators regarding the quality of education.

The accreditation of a study programme is awarded by Government Decision initiated by the Ministry of Education, based on the approval of ARACIS (or of another agency registered in EQAR). The accreditation of a higher education institution, regardless of name: university, study academy, institute, school or organization provider of education, is made by the Law, promoted by the Government, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, based on the approval of ARACIS (or another agency registered in EQAR).

Thus, the accreditation implies going through two successive stages:

- a) provisional authorization to operate, which grants the right to carry out the educational process and to organize the admission to studies, as applicable;
- b) accreditation, which grants, apart from the rights set out by point a), the right to issue diplomas, certificates and other study documents recognized by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research and to organize, as applicable, the graduation examination for first cycle (bachelor's), second cycle (master's) and third cycle, (doctoral/ Ph.D.) degrees.

The periodic external evaluation of academic quality from accredited higher education institutions is made for regular certification, at five-year intervals, of academic quality of educational and research services as part of the educational process run by an accredited university.

This implies the following essential components, as follows:

1. External evaluation at institutional level, for:

- evaluation of managerial activity and institutional structures;
- evaluation of financial activity;
- evaluation of internal quality assurance procedures;
- evaluation of state of quality at institutional level, resulted from the analysis and correlation of all the information available, corresponding to ARACIS Methodology.

2. External evaluation of quality of study programmes, by checking the fulfilment of requirements based on which the provisional authorization to operate/accreditation of programmes and institutional accreditation were granted.

3. External evaluation of master's study domains for:

- accreditation of new master's study domains, which is performed according to the Methodology approved in 2014 by external evaluation and accreditation of a master's study programme;
- periodic evaluation of accredited master's study domains, procedure which will be applied after the approval of a new methodology.

2.2 Evaluations carried out by ARACIS

In the year 2015, the Department for Accreditation of ARACIS carried out its activity according to the prerogatives set out in the Regulations for organization and functioning of the agency, respectively:

- elaboration, with the support of staff from technical department of ARACIS, of internal reports of ARACIS for validating the outcomes of evaluation missions of study programmes for temporary authorization, accreditation or maintenance of accreditation.

- Organization and administration of database regarding the evaluation of study programmes;
- Management and updating of ARACIS National Register of Evaluators.

As for the situation of higher education institutions, in the year 2015, according to GD no. 580 of 9 July 2014 (university year 2014-2015), the situation was as follows:

- State universities: **55** – *all evaluated at least once.*
- Private accredited universities: **37** of which **4** operate in liquidation with all the programmes from its structure (according to proposals made after the evaluations of ARACIS), and other **3** are in process of special monitoring. *All these universities were evaluated at least once by ARACIS.*
- Private universities authorized to operate temporarily: **10** (one of them organizes only master's degree programmes) – *except for the one which organizes only master's degree programmes, the others were not evaluated yet at institutional level.*

2.2.1. Evaluation of study programmes

In *Tables 1-3* we present the situation of study programmes from Romanian universities evaluated by ARACIS in the year 2015. Compared to the year 2014 their number increased slightly (**619 programmes** compared to 505 evaluated in 2014); this increase is due to the fact that in 2015 a larger number of institutional evaluations were performed in which we also made evaluations of study programmes.

It can be noted that most of evaluation activities targeted accredited study programmes, periodically evaluated for maintaining the accreditation. The proportion of new study programmes proposed for provisional authorisation to operate has decreased: 10% (compared to 17% in 2014). Among them, 8% did not obtain the judgment which allows them to operate (compared to 12% in 2014).

As for the study programmes subject to accreditation or regular evaluation, most of them (99.99%) obtained the maintenance of accreditation and from those subject to accreditation, all of them were accredited.

Table 1. Situation of study programmes (SP) evaluated in the year 2015, depending on the type of evaluation

Total number of evaluated SP by form of studies	Number of SP evaluated for provisional authorisation to operate (AP)	Number of SP evaluated for accreditation (A)	Number of SP periodically evaluated for maintaining the accreditation (EP)
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
567 (IF) <i>day courses/full-time</i>	57	54	456
40 (ID) <i>distance learning</i>	4	9	27
12 (IFR) <i>reduced frequency/ part-time</i>	-	4	8
TOTAL = 619	61	67	491

Table 2. Situation of study programmes evaluated in the year 2015, depending on the judgment given

Total number of evaluated SP by form of studies	Number of SP which received the judgment:		
	“Confidence”	“Limited confidence”	“Lack of confidence”
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
567 (IF)	526	32	9
40 (ID)	40	-	-
12 (IFR)	12	-	-
TOTAL = 619	578	32	9

Table 3. Results of evaluations of study programmes in 2015

	Judgment received	IF	ID	IFR
Number of SP evaluated for provisional authorisation to operate	“Confidence”	41	4	-
	“Limited confidence”	11	-	-
	“Lack of confidence”	5	-	-
TOTAL = 61		57	4	-
Number of SP evaluated for accreditation	“Confidence”	47	9	4
	“Limited confidence”	7	-	-
	“Lack of confidence”	-	-	-
TOTAL = 67		54	9	4
Number of SP periodically evaluated for maintenance of accreditation	“Confidence”	438	27	8
	“Limited confidence”	14	-	-
	“Lack of confidence”	4	-	-
TOTAL = 491		456	27	8

2.2.2. Institutional evaluations

In the year 2015 **31** higher education institutions were evaluated (of which **20** within the Project “Development and consolidation of quality culture in Romanian higher education system – QUALITAS”, POSDRU Contract /155/1.2/S/141894) - in which **321** (of which **234** in QUALITAS Project) bachelor’s degree programmes were periodically evaluated.

2.2.3. Evaluation of Master’s Study Domains

In the year 2014 we initiated the activities of elaboration of regulations for evaluation of master’s study domains. The Specific Procedure for External Regular Evaluation of Accredited Master’s Study Domains was approved by Order of the Ministry of Education and Research and published in Official Gazette, Part I, no. 236/2014.

In 2015 ARACIS evaluated 123 master’s degree programmes at the full-time form of education and two at the part-time form of education, according to the current Methodology of evaluation of study programmes.

2.3 Updating of the National Register of Evaluators of ARACIS

In the year 2015, the National Register of Evaluators (NRE) was updated, 33 new evaluators were admitted following the participation in the specific procedure (about 30% compared to the number of those admitted in NRE in 2014). The detailed situation by specialty commissions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Number of evaluators admitted in NRE, by specialty commissions

Commission	Number of evaluators admitted in 2015
C1 – Exact sciences and natural sciences	1
C2 – Humanities and theology	3
C3 – Legal sciences	1
C4 – Social, political and communication sciences	2
C5 – Administrative sciences, education and psychology	3
C6 – Economic sciences I	5
C8 – Arts, Architecture, Urban Planning, Physical Education and Sport	2
C9 – Agricultural sciences, forestry and veterinarian medicine	7
C10 – Engineering Sciences I	2
C11 – Engineering Sciences II	5
C12 – Medical Sciences	2
Total evaluators admitted in the year 2015	33

2.4 Updating of National Register of Evaluators Students of ARACIS

Table 5. Number of student evaluators of NRE, by organizations recognized at national level

Student organization	Number of student evaluators in 2015
National Alliance of Student Organizations of Romania (ANOSR)	55
National Union of Students of Romania (UNSR)	49
Union of Students of Romania (USR)	11
Total student evaluators in the National Register of Evaluators – Students in 2015	115

3. INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY OF ARACIS

3.1 Activities in ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

In the European Higher Education Area, ARACIS is Full Member of the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA* and is regularly subjected to international external evaluation procedures set out for maintenance of this status.

According to the legal provisions in force, the condition for ARACIS to continue its activity is the maintenance of the Agency in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). For this purpose, the maintenance of ARACIS as a full- member agency in ENQA is an important element in the decisions of EQAR because by this capacity it is proven that the provisions of the Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG) are met.

For this purpose, the Agency has to prove that its procedures and the other activities meet these Standards and Guidelines. According to ESG, the Agency has to be regularly evaluated by an international panel coordinated by ENQA (“ENQA coordinated review”) and draws up a Progress Report between two regular evaluations.

ARACIS was evaluated by ENQA in the year 2013 and received the confirmation of “status of full-member” for a period of five years, since 28 October 2013, decision confirmed by the General Meeting of ENQA from Dublin, Ireland, according to the letter received from ENQA, dated 28 November 2013. In the same letter it is requested a “Progress Report” that should present the way in which the recommendations included in the Report of the Panel coordinated by ENQA were applied; this Panel accomplished in 2013 the external evaluation of ARACIS and the Progress Report was scheduled for October 2015.

Therefore, in September 2015 ARACIS drew up and transmitted to ENQA Board a **Follow-up Report** regarding the actions carried out by the Agency in the two years, for the purpose of implementing the recommendations of ENQA. The document was well received by ENQA, which saluted the progress reached by ARACIS, according to the Letter of 20 November 2015 received from the President of ENQA.

By the letter mentioned above, ENQA requested ARACIS to present clarifications regarding the way in which the students are involved in evaluation teams of ARACIS; the deadline proposed by ENQA for the presentation of these clarifications is February 2016.

For fulfilling the standard of ENQA regarding the active involvement in the activities of the association, ARACIS participated in the following events organized by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education:

- 22 – 23 January 2015 – Brussels (Belgium) – meeting of ENQA Work Group “*Excellence in higher education*” (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian –Director, Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS). The work group continued its activity and established the method of valorisation of publication drawn up by it under the form of a report called *The Concept of Excellence in Higher education – ENQA Occasional Paper 20/2014*, co-author R. M. Damian). It was agreed to continue the activity of the Work Group and to schedule a new meeting in the autumn of year 2015.

- 15 – 17 April 2015 – Córdoba (Spain) – *ENQA Members' Forum and General Meeting of ENQA* in which the outcomes of the fourth project of ENQA "Quality Procedures in European Higher Education" were presented (participants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS, Cristina Ghitulica – Member in ARACIS Council).
- 12 – 13 May 2015 – Hague (Netherlands) – Works of ENQA Work Group "*Staff development group*" (participants: Oana Sârbu – Head of Department, Department of Experts and Specialized Inspectors in Accreditation and Quality Assurance, ARACIS). In the year 2011 ENQA decided to found four work groups (*Staff development, Excellence, Impact and Development*) which analyse the activity of external quality assurance agencies from the four perspectives and propose solutions for improvement of their activity. ARACIS is represented in these work groups by Professor Radu Mircea Damian, Ph.D. as coordinator of "Excellence" Work Group and by Oana Sârbu as member of Work Group ENQA "Staff development". In the meeting of May of the Work Group "Staff development" the Framework of competences of employees in an agency for quality assurance was finalized so that the meeting of October should be dedicated to the organization of Seminar regarding the training of employees from external quality assurance agencies, seminar which will be organized at the beginning of year 2016 in Gloucester, United Kingdom.
- 17 September 2015 - Brussels (Belgium) – meeting of ENQA Work Group "*Excellence in Higher Education*" (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian – Director, Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS). The work group established the format of a communication on the subject "Identification of Excellence in Higher Education" to be proposed to the European Forum for Quality Assurance – EQAF 2016 for presentation and publication.
- 15 – 16 October 2015 – Vienna (Austria) – *ENQA Seminar Reviews* (participants: Oana Sârbu – Head of Department, Department of Experts and Specialized Inspectors in Accreditation and Quality Assurance, ARACIS). This seminar was organized in view of the implementation of the new ESG in the ENQA evaluation process of quality assurance agencies. The selected participants were ENQA evaluators who will be part of the first evaluation commissions which will carry out their activity in the year 2016. Mainly there were discussed the new aspects introduced by these standards and guidelines, the approach differences, and the changes proposed in the evaluation process.
- 19 October 2015 – London (United Kingdom) – the Works of ENQA Work Group "*Staff development group*" (participants: Oana Sârbu – Head of Department, Department of Experts and Specialized Inspectors in Accreditation and Quality Assurance, ARACIS).
- 21 - 23 October 2015 – Dublin (Ireland) –*ENQA General Assembly* on the topic Strategies and Work Plan of ENQA in the field of quality assurance of higher education (participants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS, Cristina Ghitulica – Vice-president of ARACIS).
- 03 – 04 November 2015 – Brussels (Belgium) – ENQA Work Group *Internal Quality Assurance ENQA Group* (participants: Oana Sârbu – Head of Department, Department of Experts and Specialized Inspectors in Accreditation and Quality Assurance, ARACIS). In October 2015, at the proposal of ENQA Board, the Work Group Internal Quality Assurance ENQA Group was created for the purpose of paying greater attention to internal quality assurance processes from the perspective of consistence of decisions following the external evaluations organized by ENQA. The selected members are: Sandra Marcos Ortega,

ACSUCYL – Spain (Coordinator), Ole Espen Rakkestad, NOKUT – Norway, Oana Sârbu, ARACIS – Romania, Aurelija Valeikienė, SKVC – Lithuania, Núria Comet Senal, AQU Catalonia – Spain, Julien Lecoq, HCERES – France. During the period 3-4 November 2015 the first work meeting of the group took place, where the assignments of the group and of each member were decided upon, by proposing to ENQA Board a calendar for realization of proposed assignments.

- 5-7 November 2015 – Paris (France) – *Conference on QA of cross-border higher education* (participants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS).
- 30 November 2015 – Brussels (Belgium) – meeting of ENQA Work Group “*Excellence in Higher Education*” – *High Level Policy Seminar: Excellence in Higher Education through Quality Assurance* (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian –Director, Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS). The meeting was dedicated to presentation of outcomes of Work Group for the representatives of institutions with responsibilities in quality assurance which have the office in Brussels: EQAR, ESU, EURASHE, EUA, European Commission etc. In the discussions there were identified problems of many quality assurance agencies with reference to the adequacy of external evaluation methodologies for the identification of “Excellence” in higher education, compared to “excellence” in scientific research.

3.2 Activities in EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ARACIS is registered in the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – EQAR* and is regularly subjected to international external evaluation procedures set out for maintenance of this status.

The external evaluation report of ARACIS made in 2013 under the coordination of ENQA was sent to EQAR on 29 November 2013, as basis for renewal of the listing of the Agency in the Register.

By the letter of 26 May 2014, the registration of ARACIS was confirmed for a period of five years, by decision of “Register Committee” of 22 May 2014, until **30 September 2018 (5 years from the date of submission by ARACIS of the External Evaluation Report), made under the coordination of ENQA**. In the letter of EQAR it is mentioned that ARACIS has to present a report regarding the substantive changes of its Methodology regarding the external evaluation of master’s study domains, when these changes become operational and begin to be implemented. Also, in the letter of EQAR it is requested explicitly that ARACIS should include students in the evaluation teams of all study programmes, by considering this requirement in category “Flagged”, which means that it must be paid special attention and it has to be respected for the next external evaluation and for the request for renewal of the status of agency registered in EQAR. This request must be based on an external evaluation by a panel coordinated by ENQA. In the documents received from EQAR it is recommended that **ARACIS requests the external evaluation by ENQA at least 10 months before 30 September 2018.**

For active involvement in the activities organized by EQAR, ARACIS participated in 2015 in the following events organized by EQAR:

- 26 – 27 November 2015 – Sofia (Bulgaria) – *Members Dialogue* with the theme: recent evolutions in quality assurance policies, the activity of EQAR and measures for practical

realization of EQAR priorities (participants: Antonela Toma – expert of QUALITAS Project).

3.3 Activities in ENAEE - European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

ARACIS is member of European Network for Engineering Accreditation and is authorized by ENAEE to give the certification EUR-ACE® Label to bachelor's or master's degree programmes in the field of engineering, accredited following the evaluations of ARACIS.

In the year 2015 ARACIS participated in the following events organized by ENAEE:

- 17 November 2015 – Brussels (Belgium) – *General Meeting of ENAEE* in which the Projects of ENAEE were presented regarding the best practices for accreditation of study programmes in the field of engineering sciences and the advantages of EUR-ACE Label certification (participants: Simona Lache, Director of Department, ARACIS Council). In the General Meeting of ENAEE there were discussed the conditions that must be fulfilled by accreditation agencies members of network such as autonomy, involvement of all stakeholders in the accreditation process, responsibility and adequacy for the purpose. They also analysed the main advantages offered by an EUR-ACE certification, such as: internationalization of engineer profession, international recognition of quality of study programmes, facilitation of joint programmes or double degree programmes development etc. For carrying out the EUR-ACE *certification process*, ARACIS initiated a series of actions (for example, foundation of register of employers) which will continue in 2016.

3.4 Activities in CEENQA – Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

- 22 – 23 May 2015 – Ljubljana (Slovenia) – *General Meeting of Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) and the Workshop* organized by it (participants: Iordan Petrescu – President of ARACIS, Cristina Ghitulica – Vice-president of ARACIS). In the year 2015, Mrs Cristina Ghitulica continued her activity as member of Executive Office of CEENQA.

3.5 Participation of ARACIS in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research in the activities of Bologna Follow-up Group

Having in view the European priorities in quality assurance of higher education, the involvement of ARACIS representatives in the activities of BFUG (Bologna Follow-up Group) was carried out at the request of MECŞ and was financially supported by the ministry:

- 26 – 27 January 2015 – Riga (Latvia) – *Works of Bologna Follow-up Group* (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian –Director, Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS, Cristina Ghitulica – member of ARACIS Council);
- 23 – 25 March 2015 – Riga (Latvia) – *Works of Bologna Follow-up Group* (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian –Director, Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS);

- 14 – 16 May 2015 – Erevan (Armenia) – *Works of Bologna Follow-up Group and Conference of Ministers* (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian –Director, Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS, Cristina Ghitulica – member of ARACIS Council);
- 07 – 09 September 2015 – Luxembourg (Luxembourg) – *Meeting of BFUG* in which there was presented the Activity Plan of Bologna Process and BFUG for the period 2015-2018; in this period, the new Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in higher education will be implemented at European level; for this purpose, ARACIS will benefit from the outcomes of QUALITAS project, including of the new indicators which will be included in the Methodology for the evaluation of higher education institutions, university study programmes and master’s study domains (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian –Director, Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS, Cristina Ghitulica – Vice-president, ARACIS).
- In all the actions of BFUG and at the Conference of Ministers, the participation of Romania’s representatives focused on the specification of our country’s position towards the documents and actions proposed for continuation of Bologna process. Given that the quality assurance is an essential element in the promotion and success of higher education systems from the countries which are part of the European Higher Education Area, the active and constructive position of Romania, ensured also by the presence of ARACIS representatives, contributed to the adoption of significant documents on which was based the Communiqué of Ministers responsible for higher education from Erevan, in May 2015.

3.6 Activities in ESU - European Students’ Union

- 30 November – 06 December 2015 – Cluj-Napoca (Romania) – Seminar with the theme “New Trends in Quality Assurance” in which there were presented the New ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education/Models of Students’ participation in quality assurance / Current and future challenges of the European Higher Education Area – the role of quality assurance (participants: Adrian Oprea – member of ARACIS Council, Vlad Chereches – student member of ARACIS Council).

3.7 Activities in INQAAHE – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

- ARACIS participated in the elections of President and Board of INQAAHE organized in January 2015.

4. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

The main means of presentation of information on the activities of ARACIS represents the webpage of the Agency (www.aracis.ro).

In addition, in the year 2015, the Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation of ARACIS (DRIPC) monitored all the references about ARACIS appeared in the national press and made a centralization of articles about education appeared in the central press included in „Revista presei” (Press review) which was sent to the members of ARACIS Council.

For the purpose of information on the quality assurance activity at European level and not only and to disseminate the own experiences regarding the quality of higher education in Romania, ARACIS uses electronic and printed means of information. Thus, ARACIS, in the year 2015, continued the subscription to two journals:

- *Journal of the European Higher Education Area*, RAABE
- *Quality in Higher Education*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group

Publications printed in QUALITAS Project (contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894):

- Policy paper – Recommendations of institutional policies and institutional strategies in higher education;
- Synthetic report on quality evolution trends in higher education;
- Final Report on elaboration of Primary (P), Secondary (S) and Tertiary (t) quality indicators for internal quality assurance;
- Quality Barometer of higher education system 2015;
- Quality Assurance Review For Higher Education Vol. 6, Nr. 1, December 2015;
- Institutional Evaluation Report of University (for 20 evaluated universities).

Publications in the field of quality assurance of ARACIS representatives:

- Radu Mircea Damian, J. Grifoll-Sauri, Anke Rigbers, 2015, *On the Role of Impact Evaluation of Quality Assurance from the Strategic Perspective of Quality Assurance Agencies in the European Higher Education Area*, *Quality in Higher Education*, vol. 21, Number 3, December 2015, *Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group*, ISSN 1353-8322, available online at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13538322.2015.1111005> (see paragraph 5.2.1);
- Koen Geven, Oana Sârbu, Robert Santa, Adina Maricut, Norbert Sabic – *Why Do Romanian Universities Fail to Internalize Quality Assurance? – Higher Education Reforms in Romania between the Bologna Process and National Challenges*, 2015, Springer – ISSN: 978-3-319-08053-6;
- Radu Mircea Damian, Adina Ghidura, 2015, *Student-oriented learning and teaching: a new challenge for universities?*, *ARACIS, Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education, Vol.6, No.1*, December 2015, pp. 27-35, Bucharest;

5. PROJECTS

5.1 National Projects

5.1.1. QUALITAS Project

ARACIS implemented the project “*Development and consolidation of quality culture in Romanian higher education system – QUALITAS*” (contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894), in partnership with Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). The implementation period of this project was the interval April 2014 – December 2015. The carrying out of the project started on 1 September 2014.

The general objective of QUALITAS Project consisted of quality assurance in higher education system in Romania by development of an organizational culture centred on continuous improvement of quality in higher education institutions, formation of managerial competences at institutional and system level, fundamental premises for increasing the quality of study programmes, but also their relevance for the integration on labour market and for the knowledge-based society.

The operational objectives of the project were:

- 1) Evaluation of quality of national higher education system for substantiation and validation of proposals for adjustment of quality assurance and evaluation policies and methodologies.
- 2) Development and implementation of internal quality assurance system in universities, both at institutional level and at study programme level, by supporting and training of structures involved in the design and development of study programmes and internal quality assurance commissions.
- 3) Self-evaluation and regular external evaluation of universities and study programmes offered by them, but also the formulation of proposals for adjustment and continuous improvement of evaluation methodology and guidelines. For the implementation period of the project a number of 20 public and private universities were evaluated at institutional level, there were performed an analysis of educational system as well as an exchange of good practices at international level.
- 4) The improvement of university management and increase of capacity of higher education institutions to provide relevant qualifications for the labour market and to support a knowledge-based economy, by elaboration of recommendations based on national and European similar experiences and participation of the target group in training sessions, workshops, conferences etc. The project was designed for a target audience formed by: 125 experts in evaluation and accreditation from the quality assurance commissions in higher education, at national level; 140 members of quality assurance commissions at university/faculty level; 75 members of commissions/ management structures of universities and faculties; 10 persons involved in elaboration of policies in higher education; 20 persons involved in development and management of qualifications at university/faculty level; 30 students and 10 persons involved in the development of university study programmes.
- 5) Continuous development of a relevant base of indicators for measuring the quality of higher education, differentiated by types of universities and fields, for institutional diversification of higher education.
- 6) Internationalization of preoccupations with quality assurance, exchange of good practices and cooperation with similar agencies from the European Higher Education Area for assuring the convergence of national policies with relevant European policies. In the project there was elaborated a Quality Barometer of Higher Education System which is both a guide and an instrument of acknowledgement, analysis and correlation of complex phenomena existing in Romanian academic environment.
- 7) Provision of a framework of communication and cooperation between relevant organizations in higher education system for increasing the capacity of consistent strategic action at systemic level. In the project there was elaborated a Policy Paper with the purpose of offering the decision-makers recommendations, concrete policies for assurance and improvement of quality of National Higher Education System, for enhancing competitiveness at national and international level of university environment.

The project was organized in *five work packages*, as follows:

- **Package I – Project management and monitoring activities**
- **Package II – Quality evaluation and accreditation**, which was aimed at external and internal evaluation of 20 universities and evaluation of quality of national higher education system and identification of pathways for improvement of evaluation and quality assurance system in higher education.

The main *results obtained* in this work package were:

- 20 self-evaluation reports of supported universities;
 - 20 external evaluation visits of supported universities;
 - 20 external evaluation reports achieved, adopted and transmitted to supported universities;
 - A synthetic report on the quality evolution trends of higher education following the evaluations made;
 - A report with proposals for adjustment of policies and methodologies for evaluation and quality assurance in higher education.
- **Package III – Elaboration of quality evaluation indicators and compatibilization at system level**, in which there were elaborated the primary, secondary and tertiary quality indicators for internal quality assurance. In this work package there was elaborated a Final Report on elaboration of primary (P), secondary (S) and tertiary (T) quality indicators for internal quality assurance.
 - **Package IV – System Analysis: quality in Romanian higher education system**, in which there were conducted three surveys on representative samples of employers, university teaching staff and students for measuring their perception of the policies and quality of Romanian higher education system.

The main *results obtained* in this work package were:

- Three opinion polls regarding the quality of higher education, conducted among the population of teaching staff (1), students (2) and employers (3);
 - 30 interviews with representatives of the categories listed above;
 - “Quality Barometer of Higher Education” which includes the synthetic results of the three opinion polls, data resulted from external and internal evaluation of Universities and other system data;
 - a document “Policy Paper” regarding the conclusions detached from the institutional analysis which recommends policies for improvement of quality in higher education.
- **Package V – Internationalization, exchange of good practices, communication in quality assurance of Romanian higher education**, in which the following results were achieved:
 - Participation of experts in quality assurance in activities in the field of evaluation of quality assurance, educational policies etc., relevant activities both for dissemination of approaches regarding quality assurance in higher education and for identification and dissemination of the latest approaches and contributions in the field;
 - Organization of a workshop in the field of quality assurance on general and specific problems of quality assurance - participants in workshop: the staff involved in development of university study programmes (ten persons), staff involved in development and management of qualifications at university/faculty level (20 persons), staff involved in elaboration of policies in higher education (five persons), members of commissions/management structures of universities (65 persons);

- Training of relevant actors at system level in the field of evaluation of academic quality – eight training sessions, 140 members of quality assurance commissions at university/faculty level trained as internal evaluators and 100 experts in evaluation and accreditation from the quality assurance commissions in higher education, at national level, trained as external quality evaluators; minimum 30 students trained as quality evaluators in order to participate in the external evaluation missions;
- Organization of two conferences, one for start and one for end of project;
- Realization of a site of the project for presentation of its results;
- Publication of an edition of Quality Assurance Review Journal;
- Publication of materials resulted from the other activities of the project

All the publications elaborated in the framework of QUALITAS project were presented in section 4 – Information and communication. The publications are also available on the webpage of ARACIS dedicated to QUALITAS Project: <http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/>.

5.1.2. ACAD-INOV Project

ARACIS implemented the project “*Virtual Community for quality assurance and perfection of strategic and innovative management in technical and mixed universities for increasing the relevance of higher education for labour market*” (contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141884) in partnership with four universities of Romania – University Politehnica of Bucharest, “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galati, “Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, “Transilvania” University of Brasov and the company S.C. ARWEN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES S.A. (S.C. RED POINT S.A.) from Iasi. The ACAD-INOV project was implemented during April 2014 - November 2015 and the carrying out of the project started on 1 September 2014.

The general objective of the project aimed at improvement of university management by developing managerial competences, strategic planning and communication competences for assurance of quality of education, for increasing the relevance of higher education for the labour market and for the knowledge-based society.

Specific objectives:

1. Foundation, development and consolidation of a network between the partner universities for formation of an academic community of good practice, for the purpose of developing managerial and strategic planning competences, for assurance of quality of education for enhancing the relevance of higher education for the labour market. In this activity partnerships were concluded between universities. The purpose of these partnerships was to promote in the context of supporting economic development, an innovative mechanism of optimized strategic management for self-evaluation of higher education quality.

Thus, the project allowed to establish indicators for evaluation of fulfilment level of criteria, specific performance standards for two types of universities: technical universities and comprehensive universities.

2. Elaboration of specific evaluation instruments, respectively a system of reference indicators and procedures, quality assurance mechanisms and quality management at partners level, for the purpose of completing the existing evaluation methodologies, specific to technical and comprehensive universities. The project aimed at realization of innovative actions of self-

evaluation of study programmes and their correlation with labour market, by using software tools developed in the project.

3. Development and implementation of software solution for elaboration, review and testing of reference indicator systems and quality assurance and quality management mechanisms; development of training and self-training mechanisms of the staff with assignments in quality field from partner universities, for improvement of activities in the field of strategic management and quality assurance.
4. Training of teaching staff for quality assurance commissions from universities both at university and faculty level, by developing competences for perfection of strategic management, internal evaluation methods of higher education institutions' performances and evaluation of study programmes offered by them.

The main *results of the project* are:

- Formation of an inter-university network and a viable and functional practice community, conclusion of a inter-university cooperation agreement between the 4 universities which formed the consortium from this project for the realization of strategic university management network for quality assurance, stage in which there were carried out:
 - A diagnosis study regarding the methods of external quality evaluation that exist at this time;
 - Four focus-groups of analysis with 15 participants by discussion group (university partner) and four reports with the related conclusions;
 - A seminar of debating at the level of consortium the conclusions of focus groups with minimum 30 persons from target group;
 - A set of proposals to the applicant for elaboration of pilot evaluation methodology.
- Elaboration of instruments and a system of indicators for quality management elaborated in inter-university network, step which consisted of obtaining the following results:
 - A pilot inter-university network of strategic management, training, communication and development of evaluation methods of universities' performances from the perspective of quality assurance of education;
 - Four study programmes evaluated in pilot system;
 - A final evaluation report on the functioning of virtual community for quality assurance in universities of consortium;
 - A validation report of the system of reference indicators and the quality assurance procedures of education processes elaborated at partners' level.
- Implementation of a functional software solution which includes the following subsystems:
 - A training platform for training and self-training of persons from target group;
 - A communication web portal used in promotion of learning, management and planning activities in the field of strategic management in higher education;
 - An evaluation and self-evaluation system of performances of higher education for quality assurance;
 - Three analysis reports of functional requirements (a report for each subsystem);
 - Three design reports and design (a report for each subsystem);
 - Three development reports of software platform (a report for each subsystem);
 - A testing plan of software platform and a report for testing of software platform;

- A training plan of users and administrators of software platform;
 - A report for testing of functions;
 - A report on the production of software platform.
- Training of staff involved in the management of qualifications at university level and members of social partners, according to the following data:
 - Four training sessions, organized in each of partner university centres, for 100 persons from target group;
 - Staff training in the activities designed for the training of staff from target group: staff involved in elaboration of policies in higher education: 5; members of quality assurance commissions: 70; members of commissions/management structures of universities and faculties: 95;
 - A final report of training courses;
 - A course support.

5.2 International projects

5.2.1 IMPALA Project

The project “*Impact Analysis of External Quality Assurance Processes of Higher Education Institutions. Pluralistic Methodology and Application of a Formative Transdisciplinary Impact Evaluation (IMPALA)*” is funded by the Framework Programme LLP Erasmus – Lifelong learning and is carried out for a period of three years (2013-2016).

ARACIS is a partner organization in the **IMPALA** project, project coordinated by EVALAG (Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg, Germany). The partner institutions in this project are: AQU Catalunya (Barcelona, Spain), FINEEC (Helsinki, Finland), ARACIS (Bucharest, Romania), University of Stuttgart (Stuttgart, Germany), Autonomous University of Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain), University of Applied Sciences Jyväskylä (Jyväskylä, Finland), Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest (Bucharest, Romania), Prof. Dr. Bjørn Stensaker (Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Oslo, Norway), ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Brussels, Belgium) and ESU (European Students’ Union, Brussels, Belgium).

Objective:

IMPALA Project aims at development and implementation of a methodology for analysis of impact of external quality assurance procedures (External Quality Assurance - EQA) on the higher education institutions. The project also has the main objective to offer further information on the outcomes, expectations, effects and impact of external education quality assurance procedures in higher education in the four partner universities.

Expected outcomes:

The partners of IMPALA Project consider that at the end of implementation period, they will obtain the following results:

- Development and implementation of a methodology regarding the procedures related to external evaluation of quality in higher education institutions. This methodology must be flexible and easy to adjust to different external quality evaluation procedures;

- Engagement in impact analysis of members of academic community, including students;
- Analysis and comparison of impact of different external quality assurance procedures as well as perception of different actors regarding the impact of these procedures;
- Analysis of role and procedures of external quality assurance in changing and improvement of procedures for supporting the quality culture in higher education institutions;
- Improving the understanding of causal relationship between quality assurance and organizational change;
- Active cooperation of European higher education institutions;
- Future cooperation of European agencies for quality assurance and higher education institutions (developmental analysis of “benchmarking” type in the practice of quality assurance and quality management).

In the year 2015 the following activities were carried out:

- Participation in the meetings of partners set out in the project;
- Preparation of a publication which presents the role of evaluation of impact of quality assurance activities from the perspective of quality agencies from European Higher Education Area. As a result of this activity, the article “*On the role of impact evaluation of quality assurance from the strategic perspective of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*”, was published in *Quality of Higher Education*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, authors Radu Damian, Joseph Grifoll & Anke Rigbers (2005), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2015.1111005>
- Collaboration with Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest in organization of application of questionnaire for each project stage and permanent communication with the partners in the project.

5.2.2 *AQUA-TS Project*

“*The Automated Quality Control System (AQUA-TS)*” is a Leonardo da Vinci project with duration of two years (2013 – 2015) which has the purpose of designing, building and implementing operational tools for the measurement and control of indicators of the type External Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) in collaboration with the target groups and with the interested parties. ARACIS is partner in the AQUA-TS project.

This project approaches aspects of implementation of European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) framework in tourism sector by testing the tools according to the collaboration methodologies and by approach of *job shadowing*. In the project which was dedicated to a specific activity sector, we identified key challenges from tourism sector regarding vocational training and education, related to the necessity of increasing at European level the quality of VET training in tourism, to make it more attractive for the workforce. The project approaches all the actors interested in this sector, which facilitates the creation of opportunities of sharing and comparison of initiatives. This will lead to the development and implementation of a *bench-learning* instrument for the parties interested in vocational education and training in tourism at European level, with possibilities of generalization to other sectors, by offering a common training framework. For ARACIS, the participation in this project offered the occasion to identify

the common points between external evaluation of quality of university study programmes and VET programmes, and approach differences. In the perspective of undertaking by the higher education institutions of training by tertiary non-university curricula, which will be evaluated externally by ARACIS, the agency will be in a privileged position from the point of view of experience it will accumulate by participation in this project.

ARACIS participated in the following meetings organized in the AQUA-TS project:

- 29 June 2015 – Bucharest (Romania) - **Seminar at the Romanian-American University of Bucharest** (participants: Radu-Mircea Damian –Director, Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS, guests from professional organizations).

6. COOPERATION

6.1. At national level

With universities

ARACIS participated in the meetings of the National Council of Rectors organized in the year 2015.

15 October 2015 – Bucharest (Romania) – Universitaria Consortium, University of Bucharest: ARACIS participated with the presentation “Quality assurance, evaluation and excellence in higher education, Radu-Mircea Damian –Director, Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation, ARACIS.

With other organizations/institutions/agencies

ARACIS carried out permanent consultations with the Ministry of National Education, the National Council for Attestation of Academic Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU) and with the Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI).

6.2 At international level

➤ Quality Audit Network

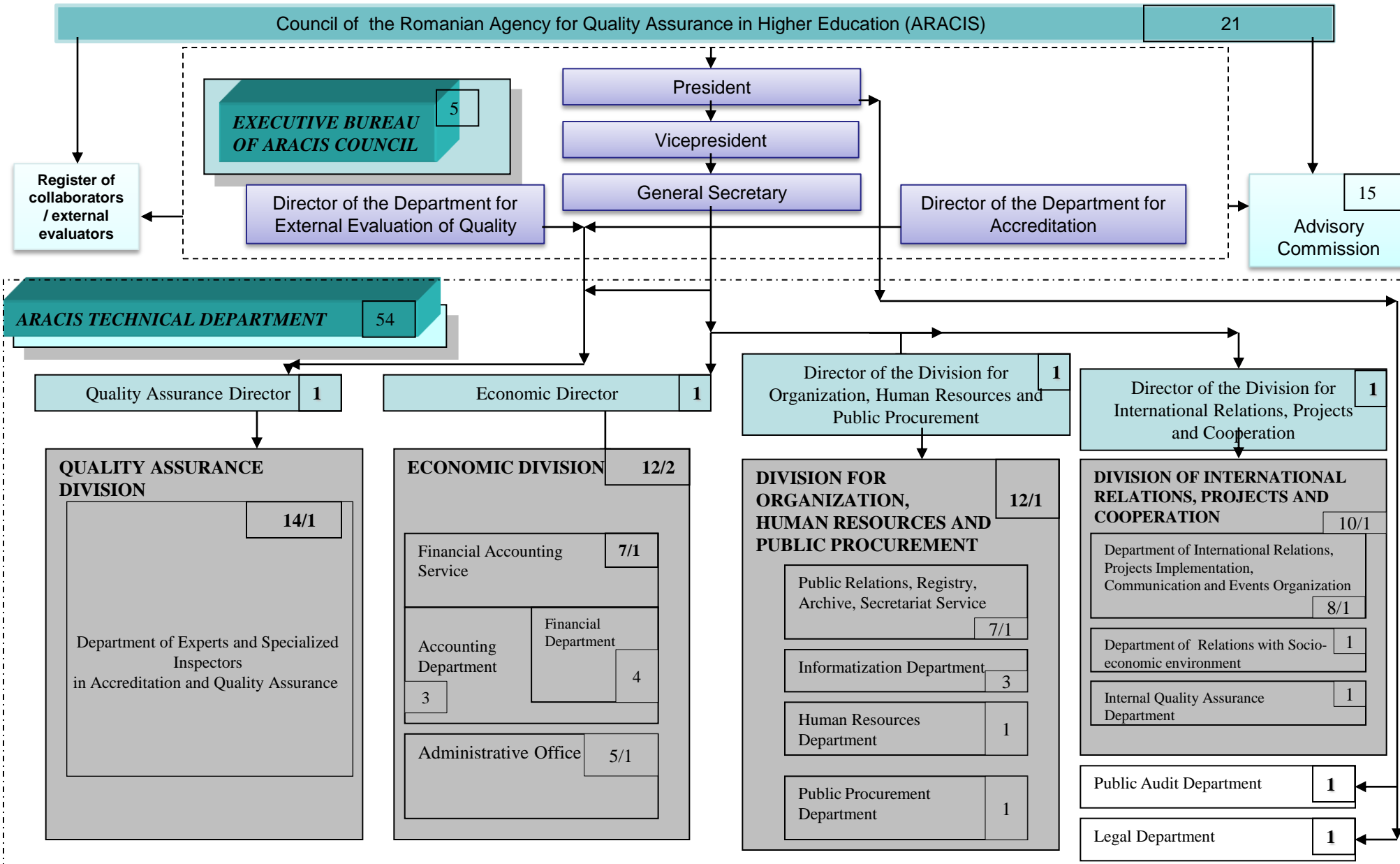
- ARACIS participated in the activities of cooperation network QAN (Quality Audit Network), being the only agency in Eastern Europe accepted in QAN (since 2012); the activity of ARACIS in this cooperation network was carried out without interruption since 2012.
 - ARACIS participated in the meeting of members of “Quality Audit Network – QAN” carried out in Hague (Netherlands) during 12 - 13 May 2015.
- ARACIS Division of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation (DRIPC) contributed to adjustment of Evaluation Methodology of 17 universities from the Republic of Moldova (evaluation contract signed between ARACIS and the Ministry of Education of Republic of Moldova);
- 01 – 05 June 2015, 15 – 17 June 2015 – participation of Mr. Radu-Mircea Damian (DRIPC Director) in the evaluation of a higher education institution from France – École Nationale Supérieure Maritime (ENSM), as external international evaluator of Commission des Titres d’Ingénieurs (CTI).

ANNEXES

ORGANIZATION CHART OF ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Annex no. 1

ARACIS (31.12.2014)



Structure of ARACIS Council in the year 2015

President:

1. Professor Petrescu Iordan, Ph.D.

General Secretary:

2. Professor Stan Vasilica, Ph.D.

Director of the Department for External Evaluation of Quality:

3. Professor Popa Ion, Ph.D.

Director of the Department for Accreditation:

4. Professor Lache Simona, Ph.D.

Members:

5. Associate Professor Corbu Nicoleta, Ph.D.
6. Professor Georgescu Puiu Lucian, Ph.D.
7. Professor Grigoras Gheorghe, Ph.D.
8. Associate Professor Ghitulica Cristina, Ph.D.
9. Professor Iamandi Luca, Ph.D.
10. Professor Lascar Ioan, Ph.D.
11. Associate Professor Bunoiu Octavian Madalin, Ph.D.
12. Professor Cojocaru Dorian, Ph.D.
13. Professor Ianos Ioan, Ph.D.
14. Associate Professor Ispas Gabriel Liviu, Ph.D.
15. Professor Lache Simona, Ph.D.
16. Professor Nagy Ladislau, Ph.D.
17. Professor Opre Adrian, Ph.D.
18. Popescu Cristi – student (until 01.10.2015)
19. Chereches Vlad – student (since 01.10.2015)
20. Sheila Abdulamit – student (until 01.10.2015)
21. Tunsoiu Nicolae – student (since 01.10.2015)

Advisory Commission of ARACIS

Acad. Ionel Haiduc – President of Romanian Academy

Prof. Dinu Airinei, Ph.D. – "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi

Prof. Cezar Birzea, Ph.D. – National School of Political Science and Public Administration of Bucharest

Prof. Oprea Calin, Ph.D. – „Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest

Prof. Dumitru Gaspar, Ph.D. – West University of Timisoara

Prof. Viorel Lefter, Ph.D. – Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Prof. Mircea Miclea, Ph.D. – "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Mircea Cristel Muthu, Ph.D. – "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Delia Marina Podea, Ph.D. – „Vasile Goldis" Western University of Arad

Prof. Gheorghe Popa, Ph.D. – „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi

Prof. Alexandru Popovici, Ph.D. – Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti

Prof. Zoltan Rostas, Ph.D. – University of Bucharest

Prof. Gheorghe Solomon, Ph.D. – University Politehnica of Bucharest

Prof. Emilian Stancu, Ph.D. – University of Bucharest

Prof. Paul Serban Agachi, Ph.D. - Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Mircea Ivanescu, Ph.D. – University of Craiova

Prof. Adrian Miroiu, Ph.D. - National School of Political Science and Public Administration of Bucharest

Prof. Mihai Octavian Popescu, Ph.D. - University Politehnica of Bucharest