

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance
in Higher Education (ARACIS)

Self Evaluation Report
2013



Sediul ARACIS

SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

(SER)

of

ARACIS

For renewal of Full Membership with ENQA

(European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)

and

For renewal of ARACIS listing within the

EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education)

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This Application is organized in accordance to Parts 2 and 3 of the European Guidelines for external Reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area - ESG.

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Based on the letter dated 5155/30.08.2012, ARACIS submitted its application for assessment of the compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), in view of renewal of Full Membership with ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and also for renewal of ARACIS listing within the EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education).

1. General presentation of ARACIS

1.1 Status

The introductory part of the general presentation continues and extends the one included in the Self Evaluation Report submitted to ENQA in 30.08.2012 as part of the application for full membership. This option is supported by the fact that the changes in Romanian legislation and of some other subsequent secondary regulations aiming to improve the independence of the agency and to extend the representation in the ARACIS Council of study domains did not alter the basic concepts, procedures, standards and performance indicators used in the quality assurance exercise.

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is known by the Romanian acronym ARACIS which stands for „*Agencia Română pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior*”, referred to thereafter as **ARACIS / the Agency**. The Agency started to function in 2005, being instituted by the legal provisions of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, referred to thereafter as the Ordinance. In 2006 some provisions of the Ordinance were modified by the Parliament, the Ordinance was adopted by the Parliament and became the Law nr. 87/2006, referred to thereafter as the Law (Annex 1; Note: in the Annex the Law is presented in an integrated form, as it is in force at the moment this SER was drafted, which includes all subsequent modifications). The Law provides the framework regarding quality assurance in education as a whole, while also referring specifically to quality assurance and to the concept of accreditation in Romanian education and, specifically, in higher education. The Ordinance and then the Law were drafted and approved in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Bergen, 2005) adopted by the ministers responsible for higher education from the Bologna countries. The provisions of the Law either include specifically or implicitly comply with the principles and standards which are currently applied in European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In what follows, references to the existing provisions of the Law and to their roots are made in order to outline some contextual legal current and historical dimensions of the current activities of ARACIS. An important modification of the legislation was the fact that ARACIS' independence was strengthened by the new provisions (**Law amending Emergency Government Ordinance no. 75/2005 on providing quality education – April, 2011 – Annex 1**) that the Agency is now empowered to better match its number of permanent staff positions to its evolving working demand and to include two student representatives as full members of the Council (initially, until April 2011 the two students had observer status).

ARACIS is ENQA full member since June 2009

In 2011 ARACIS sent to ENQA the Progress Report in which it was shown how the observations and recommendations following the 2009 ENQA co-ordinated review of the agency were addressed by ARACIS. The Progress Report was accepted by the ENQA Board without further observations (see Annex 2 – Progress Report and Annex 3 – ENQA Board letter to ARACIS).

ARACIS is listed in the EQAR since September 2009

1.2 Terminology

ARACIS's mission is, according to the law, to assess the quality of the study programmes, study domains and Higher Education Institutions as well as to contribute, together with the HEIs, to quality enhancement. This is done via a process of evaluation, which starts with a review of the way in which the requirements of pre-determined and published quality standards and performance indicators are met.

The terminology used in this SER was chosen, for clarity, according to the specificity of the Romanian language. Thus, in English terms such as audit, review, assessment or evaluation have not always the same connotation and are translated with difficulty into Romanian. Since they are usually translated from English into Romanian by the Romanian word “*evalua*re” (in English: “evaluation”) we use in drafting the ARACIS procedures (in Romanian) the word “*evalua*re”, as a more complex process, to be differentiated of „control”. Therefore, to avoid any possible confusion, in the English versions of our documents (including this SER) the word “evaluation” was kept as a general concept to cover all the others ones which could be considered somewhat equivalent, as they are defined also in the ESG.

The evaluation procedure is finalized by a report, a “quality judgment” (i.e. „High Degree of Confidence” etc.) and by follow-up procedures. The Report includes a proposal to the Ministry of National Education which shall empower it with legal consequences (i.e.: „accreditation” or „maintaining the accreditation” etc.).

1.3 Activity

Since 2005 ARACIS has carried out the following external quality evaluation activities, which are current and permanent:

- evaluation of first cycle study programs (Licență – in English: equivalent of Bachelor) - (Day course, Part-time course and Distance learning) seeking accreditation (or, according to the case, provisional authorizing as first step of accreditation);
- evaluation of second cycle (Master) study programs - (Day course and Distance learning) seeking accreditation - (Day course and Distance learning);
- periodical evaluation of accredited study programs – first cycle (Licență);
- external evaluation of higher education institutions (periodical or in view of accreditation);
- system-wide analyses (since 2009);
- co-operation with universities and counseling;
- co-operation with the National Authority for Qualifications;

Other activity include:

- drafting proposals for adapting Methodologies to requirements of the Law of national education
- 2011 (work in progress);
- coordination and running of national projects in quality assurance, including projects selected for funding from European Structural Funds (since 2008);
- participation in ENQA activities;
- participation to international projects in quality assurance (since 2007);
- participation in ENQA co-ordinated quality assurance projects (since 2009);
- organization in Romania of quality assurance international events (ENQA General Assembly – October, 2011, CEENQA General Assembly – May, 2013 – work in progress) etc;
- participation to international events organized by INQAAHE;
- co-operation with European International Professional Organizations (i.e. ENAEE).

The total number of decisions taken by ARACIS on accreditation or evaluation amounts to over 5700 (as of 17.10.2012), since the activity of the agency started. From the date of the previous SER in 2009 the total number of accreditation and evaluation reports is over 3500.

1.4 Structure of Human resources

ARACIS operates with six categories of human resources, described also in more detail under compliance with ESG 3.4 – Resources:

i) ARACIS Council, composed of 25 members (23 academics and 2 students)

According to a recent (December 19, 2012) modification of the Law, the Agency is lead by a Council of 25 members, with high academic and moral status, 23 holding teaching positions in the higher education system and two student representatives. Rectors and any other persons who hold high official positions within the Presidency, the Government or the Parliament cannot become members of the Council of ARACIS, in order to ensure complete independence and transparency.

The Law stipulates that from the academic members of the Council, five are members of the Executive Board, which is the structure that has to ensure the daily management routine of the Agency. Two of the five members of the Executive Board, the President of the Council and the Vice-president, are elected by their peers via a secret voting procedure. The other three members of the Board are appointed by the President and serve as Directors of Departments (Accreditation and External Quality Evaluation, respectively) and Secretary General.

ii) External evaluators (academics or researchers)

The evaluators are registered in the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators (NRAE) which includes both *Romanian* and *international* academics and researchers. The Agency has its own “National Register of ARACIS Evaluators (NRAE)” which includes 1333 evaluators (professors, senior lecturers or 1st. degree researchers). From the members included in the NRAE, some are members of the 15 Permanent (Standing) Specialty Commissions which are active in the

following domains: basic and natural sciences; humanities and theology; law; social sciences, political and administrative sciences; economic sciences (two commissions); arts, architecture, urban planning and sports; agriculture, forestry and veterinary medicine; engineering sciences (two commissions); medical sciences; distance learning; institutional evaluation for managerial and financial activities, employers representatives. As in the case of the Council members, in order to ensure complete independence and transparency, persons holding official positions, such as Rectors, or others cannot continue to be active as evaluators. The evaluators are selected for different missions with due care as to avoid conflict of interests.

iii) Student evaluators, representing the students' unions active in Romania which have obtained a legal status. The student evaluators, who are proposed by the students' unions or act in their own capacity, become eligible for evaluation missions only after having been trained.

iv) Professional staff, with the mission and expertise to assist the Council, the directors of the Accreditation Department and External Evaluation Department of the ARACIS Council, respectively, the Permanent Specialty Commissions and all other evaluators in organizing and running the external evaluation procedures;

v) Administrative staff, responsible for the administration, financial matters, archive, communication and maintenance of the premises.

The total number of the permanent professional and administrative staff was initially limited by law to 35. Following a recent legislative initiative (**Law amending Emergency Government Ordinance no. 75/2005 on providing quality education – April, 2011**) the restriction was lifted and ARACIS can dimension the number of professional and administrative staff according to the activity of the agency.

vi) Other staff, hired on temporary basis, who assist the agency for different purposes, such as external financial auditors, lawyers etc.

All the working documents, methodology and guides are published on the ARACIS web site, <http://www.aracis.ro> and as brochures made available to all the stakeholders.

2. Compliance with Part 3 - European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies

The paragraph numbers of each standard of the ESG are those used in the ESG.

3.1- Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

Standard: The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

ARACIS Compliance

ARACIS undertakes external QA-activities on a regular basis. Activities such as periodic/cyclical evaluation and in view of accreditation at study programs as well as at HE institution level are part of the core current functions of ARACIS.

The concepts, procedures and processes developed by ARACIS for external quality assurance are differentiated in order to take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the ESGs.

Sequencing and references for quality assurance

(Requested by universities or Cyclical evaluations)

LEGAL FRAMEWORK		
(as per Law 86/2006 – OUG 75/2011, with subsequent modifications)		
<i>QUALITY ASSURANCE DOMAINS</i>		
<i>for QA of education providers in Higher Education</i>		
<i>a. Institutional Capacity</i>	<i>b. Effectiveness of Education</i>	<i>c. Internal Quality Management</i>
<i>Criteria and Standards</i> <i>(as specified by ARACIS)</i>	<i>Criteria and Standards</i> <i>(as specified by ARACIS)</i>	<i>Criteria and Standards</i> <i>(as specified by ARACIS)</i>
<i>Performance indicators</i> <i>(as specified by ARACIS)</i>	<i>Performance indicators</i> <i>(as specified by ARACIS)</i>	<i>Performance indicators</i> <i>(as specified by ARACIS)</i>
HE Provider: Self Evaluation Report (SER) of Study Program or HEI		
ARACIS: External Evaluation Panel - Analysis of SER + Site visit(s)		
CONCLUSIONS: preliminary, moderation procedures		
JUDGMENT		
APPEALS PROCEDURE		
FINAL JUDGMENT: communication of results to HEI and Ministry of National Education		
ARACIS and HE Provider: FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES		

The first characteristic of the external evaluation is that it uses standards, criteria and performance indicators fit-for-purpose for study programs, according to the Bologna cycles: 1st cycle (Licență, equivalent to the Bachelor's degree), 2nd cycle (Master degree) and 3rd cycle (Doctoral degree). These are included and published in the Evaluation Guide.

Thus, while the general concepts of quality domains and standards are basically the same, according to the Law, their corresponding performance indicators can be different and specific according to the type of degree obtained after graduation (Licență, Master or Doctorate).

The second parameter differentiates in terms of the scope of the external evaluation process by making the distinction between *periodic/cyclical quality assurance evaluation of (already) accredited study programs or HE institutions* and *external evaluation for accreditation*. While both evaluations are contributing to quality enhancement, the *periodic external evaluation* and the *external evaluation aiming to accreditation* have their own specificities.

The ARACIS proposal for *accreditation* is considered as a particular result of the external evaluation of *study programs or institutions*, followed legally by a formal recognition by the authorities, as a “certification” of an external quality assurance evaluation with satisfactory outcomes (results). In the process of accreditation, the external evaluation is expected to certify firstly the compliance of an institution or study program with pre-determined minimal performance indicators, and is finalized with the “yes/no” binary-type final judgment, with a proposal which either grants or does not grant the right to function to a HEI or study program.

According to the Law, accreditation is a two-steps legal procedure: whenever an education provider intends to establish/open a new HEI or initiates a new study program that corresponds to a specific qualification, that provider is submitted to a process of external evaluation in order to be first provisionally authorized and then accredited only after successfully running the study program for a number of years (i.e.: for “Licență” study programs - the interval between the graduation date of the first cohort of students and the date of the application for accreditation should not exceed two years; for HE education providers as institutions – only after the accreditation of three study programs).

In the process of *periodic external quality assurance evaluation of accredited study programs or institutions*, the external evaluation aims mainly to take as reference the standards and indicators of quality set to fit the mission and purposes of the study program or HEI and provides an external feed-back for further development and enhancing its institutional quality provision (for instance, performance indicators raised at “reference values” set by the institution, based on its own goals and after a benchmarking process).

As it was already mentioned, accredited HEI and study programs are subject to a periodic (cyclical - every 5 years) external evaluation of its quality management and education provision. The external evaluation of accredited HEI refers also to the functioning of about 20% of already accredited study programs which are selected together by both the HEI and ARACIS. In such a process, the key reference of the institutional external evaluation remains the accredited HEI as an entity. The 20% of the accredited study programs are evaluated to keep alive the dynamics of the quality enhancement process, to help the institution with periodic evaluations of study programs and to insure permanent contact between the institutions and the Agency. Thus, the process is not static, all the study programs and institutional management have to improve the level of performance indicators as compared to the previous external evaluation.

The procedures of decision taking and reporting, related to Part 2 of the ESGs, are followed thoroughly by the agency, which started to use a special form-sheet for monitoring the sequence of the activities in the process and developed a dedicated database to include comprehensive information from all accredited HEIs.

3.2 - Official status

Standard: Agencies should be formally recognized by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

ARACIS Compliance

ARACIS was established by the Law for the purposes, *inter alia*, of externally evaluating and quality assuring higher education providers who either currently, or plan to award HE qualifications. In view of Art. 16(1) of the Law, “ARACIS is an autonomous public institution, of national interest, having a legal status (“personalitate juridică”) and its own budget of revenue and expenses”. In order to further assure the legal basis for ARACIS, the Law stipulates that the ARACIS headquarters, organizational structures and internal rules of functioning are adopted by decision of ARACIS Council. Therefore, once the ARACIS Methodology is approved, the Government and particularly the Ministry of National Education have no direct institutional influence on the ARACIS decisions with regard to its organization and its activity for the external evaluation of the institutional and study programs quality assurance. Furthermore, the Ministry delivers the official forms of the diplomas to be filled in by higher education institutions and awarded to their graduates only for institutions and study programs having fulfilled all the legal requirements regarding QA and accreditation. If a HEI or study programme is not authorized but delivers diplomas, these diplomas are not legally recognized and the persons and institutions having acted in this sense are held responsible according to the law.

ARACIS is thus an autonomous, officially (legally) entrusted Agency which provides services related to HE quality assurance and accreditation. The services are provided in three related ways:

- (a) co-operation with HEIs for identifying quality issues from a Romanian and European (global) perspective;
- (b) responding to specific demands of the national authorities with regard to academic quality assurance issues and to quality external evaluation;
- (c) responding to academic entrepreneurs who intend to establish new study programs and/or HEI through processes of accreditation. In addition, whenever ARACIS considers it relevant, it

may initiate processes of addressing specific quality issues through studies and external evaluations.

ARACIS organization and activities comply with other requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate, such as the Government Ordinance on Tariffs 1731/2006 – Annex 4, the provision of the Government Ordinance on self-financing of the Agency - Annex 5 and the Methodology for External Evaluation – Annex 6 thus strengthening the independence of the Agency.

3.3 - Activities

Standard: Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

Guidelines: These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

ARACIS Compliance

As indicated under ESG 3.1, according to the Law, the core activities of ARACIS are performed on a regular basis and include the following:

(a) external evaluation for accreditation of study programs; (b) external evaluation for accreditation of Higher Education Institutions; (c) periodic external evaluations (periodic reviews) for quality assurance in accredited higher education institutions or study programs; (d) HE system evaluations.

To be noted that, according to the Law of National Education (art. 194 al. 2), in Romania accreditation of HEIs and study programs, periodic external evaluation for quality assurance of accredited institutions may also be undertaken by any agency listed in the European Register of QA Agencies, on a contractual basis.

The overall synopsis of the activities performed by ARACIS in the period 2007 – present is shown in Annex 7. In Annex 7 the type of evaluation is indicated, together with the outcomes. We underline again that **evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities are termed in this report as “evaluation”**, due to difficulty in the English-Romanian translation and vice-versa.

The preliminary requirements conditioning accreditation are of normative type, obligatory, detailed and more quantitatively oriented. This situation reflects the complex situation in Romania, where public and private universities are part of the academic system. All Romanian universities are, as everywhere in the world, in competition for students and resources and equal QA conditions need to be demonstrated by each of them in order to make the competition as fair as possible, for the benefit of students. It is also to be noted that in Romania the public sector offers education to approx. 2/3 of the total number of students and the private sector to the rest. The criteria, standards and performance indicators are the same for both public and private sectors of HE.

The nature and aims of the external evaluations and the activities are described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Accreditation

i) In order to verify if a **new or existing higher education institution is capable to start an activity in a given study domain or extend its activity in a new study domain**, most of the preliminary requirements are mostly of a quantitative type and refer extensively to institutional and study program capability in order to clearly support the final provisional authorizing proposal, as a first step to accreditation.

This approach gives ARACIS a sound quantitative basis to provide convincing answers when the proposal denying accreditation is contested and even defend possible judicial cases brought against it. As new “academic entrepreneurs” and their institutions and programs are expected to continue to emerge, ARACIS must still use a number of detailed quantitative requirements and indicators while developing new standards within the legal provisions. ii) **The evaluation of part-time and distance learning study programs**, with indication of emergence of new on-line and trans-national type. Some specific indicators and procedures were formulated and adopted in this regard too.

iii) **Specific evaluation of Master programs and Master domains** - ARACIS already evaluated a number of 2157 **Master programs**, at the request of the interested institutions, in view of accreditation. Master programs may be focused on research, namely the advanced study in a scientific domain, on complementarities, namely inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary connecting different domains, or on professionalization, namely gaining professional competences in a specialised domain. In the external evaluation made in view of accreditation, the provisions of the *Government's Decision no. 404/2006 with regard to the organization and implementation of Master's Degree studies* are also applied. The evaluation process, standards and performance indicators are presented in the second part of the ARACIS Guide I for external evaluation - http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/Part_I_-_STUDY_PROGRAMMES_ACCREDITATION.pdf

The evaluation of Master's domains will start soon, in accordance with the provisions of the new Law of National Education: “The accreditation of a domain for the Master degree education together with the maximum number of the students that can be admitted and who can receive a graduation diploma is done by a government decision, based on an external evaluation performed by ARACIS or by another quality assurance agency from Romania or abroad, listed in the European Quality Assurance Register, hereinafter referred to as EQAR.”

As indicated before, the new type of evaluation, namely evaluation of Master domains in view of accreditation is about to start, after the new procedure is approved by Government decision. Cyclical Master programs evaluation continues to be part of periodical institutional evaluation and in this way ARACIS has already re-evaluated a significant number of Master programs.

iv) For doctoral programs, though the “Bologna type” 3rd cycle university studies” should also be accredited by ARACIS, the initial steps have so far been taken, with a new draft of the Methodology. However, a joint evaluation by an international panel of Romanian and Bulgarian specialists of the Doctoral programs and schools in one university in Bulgaria and in one university in Romania was performed as a pilot.

Periodic external evaluation for quality assurance of accredited study programs and institutions

The Law requires that accredited HEIs and study programs are subject to a periodic (cyclical, every 5 years) external evaluation of institutional quality assurance mechanisms and compliance with the ESGs. The implication is that the HEIs are made fully responsible for establishing and developing those institutional capacities, educational effectiveness and quality management processes that satisfy their specific positioning in the higher education system and for the level of accountability to their stakeholders. ARACIS provides, through its Methodology, all HEIs with a framework of standards and performance indicators which are to be taken as reference points by the accredited HEIs. This means that HEIs are expected to:

- define their own level of performance for each performance indicator in line with their own mission statement (“reference values”) and prove they have achieved them;
- establish new standards and performance indicators of their own and prove how they have achieved them;
- compare themselves with other HEIs from Romania and from elsewhere by developing appropriate benchmarks;
- inform students, stakeholders and the public at large on their quality provision;
- create databases that correspond to the standards and performance indicators.

Then, in the periodic evaluation process ARACIS must evaluate compliance with the ESG, the degree of conformity with the standards and performance indicators which have supported the accreditation and, in addition, stress on evaluating how the institution or study program has improved the level of quality by meeting the goals specified according to the own “reference” performance indicators or to their own new quality standards.

HE System evaluations: monitoring quality in higher education

Following the first ENQA co-ordinated review of ARACIS in 2008 a large number of Romanian universities and study programs have been evaluated by the agency. This was an opportunity to broaden the area of institutional evaluation by covering a large part of the higher education landscape. As a result of the system (transversal) evaluations a number of strong and weak points were identified. The Quality Barometers (see Annex 8, Annex 9) provide valuable information on the strong and weak points identified in the Romanian HE system. However, although the comments reflect the opinion and position of the main contributors, these were published

unaltered by the agency in order to make their findings public and to be used for further interpretation, in correlation with additional data. Due to this option, some of the conclusions of the Quality Barometers must be used with due care.

Standard: Agencies should have adequate and proportionate resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organize and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

ARACIS Compliance

Human resource

Since the previous ENQA co-ordinated review of the agency, in **April 2011 (Annex 1) the Law approving Emergency Government Ordinance no. 75/2005 on providing quality education** – was modified in the sense that the Agency was empowered to better match its number of permanent staff positions to its evolving working demand and to include two student representatives as full members of the Council (initially, until April 2011 the students had only observer status).

ARACIS operates with five categories of human resources, on the basis of the principles established in the Code of Professional Ethics – Annex 10:

i) According with recent new legislation (Ordinance 92/ December 2012) **ARACIS Council** has 25 members (23 academics, *to represent different study domains* and 2 students). Therefore, part of the present composition of the ARACIS Council was established according to ARACIS selection procedure in September 2009 (13 academics) as well as to the selection procedure of February – March 2013 (in progress – for 10 more academics); since 2011, the 2 students were reconfirmed yearly by their respective students organizations at the beginning of each academic year.

ii) **External evaluators** (teaching or research staff), who are voluntarily registered in the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators (NRAE) which includes both Romanian and international academics.

The role of the evaluators, that of the Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions and the selection of the panels was briefly described in the introductory part of this self-evaluation report. To help the agency and the evaluators, an electronic facility has been developed and implemented which allows the agency to test the level of understanding of the QA procedures of the agency of all the external evaluators, local and from abroad, who intend to become eligible to take part in evaluation of study programs and higher education institutions. Thus, the evaluators listed in the NRAE undergo a thorough selection, which takes place in electronic form as an online real-time evaluation process. Following this testing, which is also a learning exercise for

the candidates the number of evaluators in the register is now of 1333 (see <http://pfe.aracis.ro/cms/>).

The composition of the Standing committees has been periodically revised after an analysis of the quality of their work and interaction with the universities.

iii) Students evaluators, representing the main Students' Unions active in Romania with a legal status, namely ANOSR, UNSR and to a lesser extent USR. At the same time, through the modification of the ARACIS composition by the Law, recognizing the importance of the students as major stakeholders within the higher education system, two supplementary positions of member of the Council were created and were entrusted to the representatives of the two main and active Romanian Students Unions. Therefore, students participate, throughout the Council, to the debates and the decision-making process.

Up to the date, several training sessions were organized for an average of 120 students, out of which around 75 already participated in the external evaluation panels at institutional level. Training student evaluators is a permanent task for ARACIS and the students' organizations due to the fact that a number of trained students graduate each year and leave the educational system. One more joint training session will be organized, under the responsibility of ANOSR.

iv) Professional staff, the Accreditation Department and External QA Evaluation Department of the ARACIS Council. Their responsibilities are multiple: to receive and technically control institutional applications, distribute them to the panels of evaluators, assisting evaluation panels in their activity, assuring proper and follow-up of documents, assisting in writing reports and analyses.

The quality of the activity of permanent staff has been monitored by several procedures which are stipulated in the Romanian legislation. As a result of this process, which is performed on a yearly basis, but also when there are special requirements, one staff member had to leave the agency in April 2011 since the level of performance was considered un-satisfactory at all three evaluations. Several permanent staff participated in study visits organized by the agency to our ENQA partner agencies, in which other stakeholders were invited to take part in order to help with the understanding of other European experience in quality assurance in higher education and application of the ESGs. (see Annex 11 - the list of agencies visited by ARACIS delegations under the framework of the project ACADEMIS).

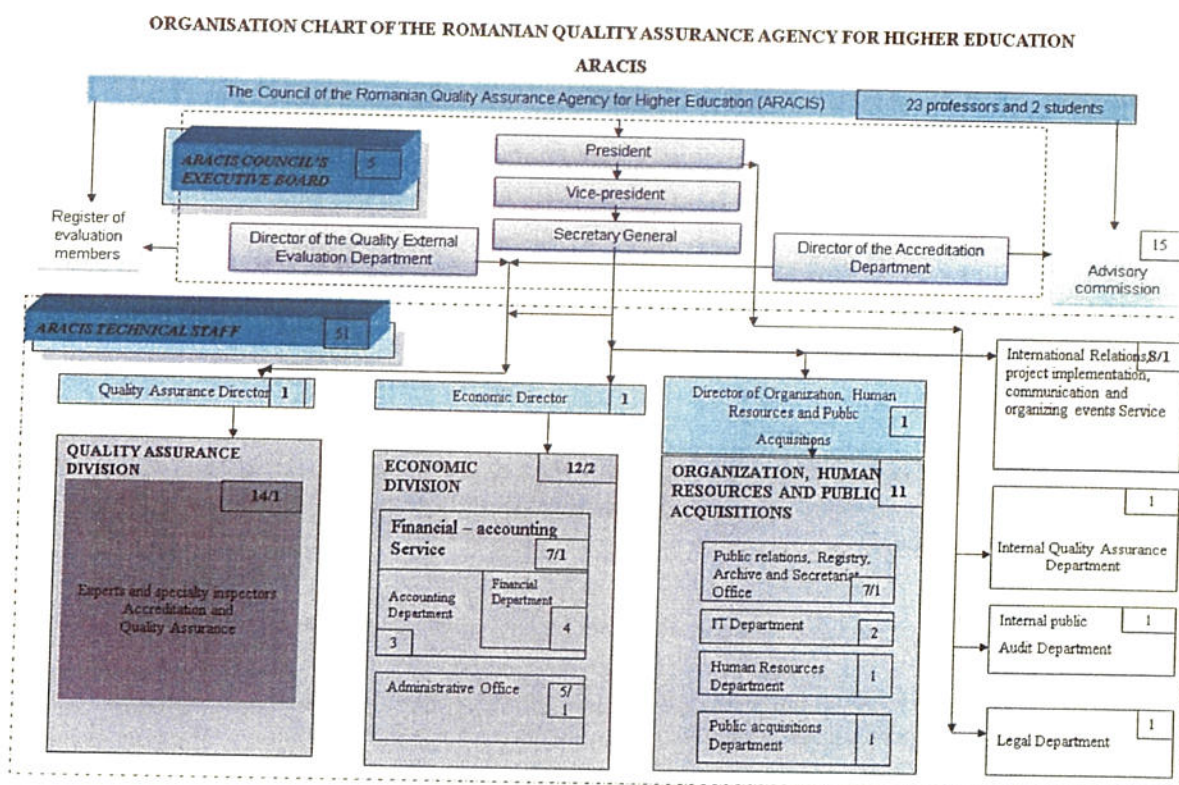
v) Administrative and financial staff, who is led by a financial director, responsible for financial matters, accountable to the President of the ARACIS Council.

The existing professional and administrative staff is considered adequate in numbers and quality to enable the Agency to organize and operate its external quality assurance processes in an active and efficient manner based on the current scale of activities.

The ARACIS Council set-up professional other staff development activities, including by using the resources of the projects implemented over the 2008-2013 period. For instance, as proficiency in English was found to be limited for some staff, trainings were organized after

passing a test applied to all personnel. One impediment to hire new staff is the legal limitation forbidding public institutions to hire more personnel and, in the past three years, obliging them to cut salaries up to 25%. Another aspect addressed throughout the EU funded project ACADEMIS was the nomination of the “mission scientific secretaries”, meant to give assistance to review panels for institutional evaluations which were in excess of the normal work-hours of permanent staff members.

Based on the new provision of the Law, a Public Relations and International Relations department was created. Together with other internal structures of the agency, it contributes to the management of other and, hopefully, of further approved EU funded projects which have been submitted and are to be evaluated by the Ministry of National Education in order to be approved.



Financial resources

With regard to the **financial resources**, ARACIS relies on the following sources of income:

- **Fee income** from higher education institutions and other higher education providers, which cover the costs of the external evaluations. The amount of fees is specified by Government decision according to specific criteria, such as study program level, as student number of the institution etc.
- **Contracts** with the Ministry of National Education, when it requests the undertaking of specific activities, and/or the external evaluation of quality assurance at institutional level.

- **Funds attracted following successful participation in public competitions** (tenders) for EU structural funds when the priorities of interest regard quality in higher education. This possibility allowed ARACIS to apply for several projects. Two projects were financed and implemented by ARACIS as beneficiary; in several others ARACIS acted as partner.

In 2012, fee income represented more than 91% of ARACIS revenue and the EU financed projects and interest rates made up the rest. ARACIS has managed to keep the expenditures within its approved annual budget and secure a roll-over revenue of about 20% of the 2012 budget for activities to be performed after the fees were cashed-in.

The financial auditing of ARACIS was done by registered external auditors and the accounting rules are those of an agency of public utility.

Funding of the agency provides appropriate resources for the development of the processes and procedures as well for participation in the activities of ENQA, such as projects, working groups, quality assurance Fora.

ARACIS is trying to constantly improve its own internal QA process and procedures, as a condition of up-grading a sound internal quality culture.

Premises

In terms of **premises** ARACIS uses the office rooms rented from the Bucharest University, as the different attempts to acquire its own building failed, due to the scarce and expensive offer of adequate office spaces.

Website

The **website** of the Agency was reorganized and has become more friendly and effective, contributing to improved visibility of the activity of ARACIS. The new English version includes also the procedures for international evaluators to become listed in the Register of external evaluators and on the site one can find accurate data on the current activities, as well as information on organization, procedures, results of evaluation, legislative framework, international activities, publication, projects etc.

3.5 - Mission statement

Standard: Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

Guidelines: These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labor with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic

approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

ARACIS Compliance

ARACIS serves the public interest by realizing quality standards for study programs and Higher Education institutions and by supporting the continuous enhancement of quality management. The standards and procedures developed and used by ARACIS are in accordance with ESG. The Mission statement of ARACIS is available on the website of ARACIS – www.aracis.ro, both in Romanian and in English.

ARACIS' carries out the quality external evaluation of education provided by higher education institutions and by other organisations providing higher education study programs, which operates in Romania with the aim of:

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

The Mission statement is thus organized around four key-concepts that underline ARACIS' work - **quality** (*constant review and enhancement* of quality, including of its own activities), **information and transparency** (informing stakeholders and the public, by periodical reports on the state of quality of the HE sector), **co-operation** (both with HEIs and similar QA-agencies), European and **international relevance** and visibility (by co-operating with other relevant European and international bodies).

Therefore, based on that mission statement, the key activities of ARACIS are related to setting standards (performance indicators, benchmarks), quality improvement services to the academic community and providing information to the public, to other stakeholders and participants (including students) of HEIs and study programmes.

The mission and the activity of ARACIS are in accordance with the legislative regulations in force in Romania.

3.6 - Independence

Standard: Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and

recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

ARACIS Compliance

Under the current legislation in force, ARACIS enjoys a high degree of independence in its organization and full independence in all its operational activities and decisions.

There is no formal possibility, for any governmental or institutional body, to influence one way or the other the processes of recruiting/nominating external evaluators and the outcome of their external evaluation. The eligibility for membership of the ARACIS Council is set out in the Law and the Council is fully autonomous in selecting its members using its own procedure, the By-Laws and internal regulations of the Agency and also in choosing its own evaluators. The decisions of the Council are taken independently, according to clear procedures made publicly available, the right to appeal is granted, and the procedures for dealing with such appeals are in place and public. The decisions and recommendations cannot be influenced by third parties. Thus, ARACIS is an autonomous body and is independent from any external interference with its work and decisions. Financial independence from Governmental and other institutions is also granted by law.

3.7 - External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

Standard: The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Guidelines: Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes.

Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.

Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

ARACIS compliance

The process, domains, criteria, standards and performance indicators used by ARACIS in the external evaluations are pre-defined in the Methodology and its accompanying Guides. The Methodology is legally enforced by a Government Decision nr. 1418/2006 in order to provide the legal basis for ARACIS actions and approaches. All these documents are available in Romanian and English both in printed form and on line (ARACIS website). The Guides have been up-dated in accordance with the findings of the system-wide analyses and the developments in the higher education system.

These documents have two complementary functions:

- (a) to provide and disseminate the legal framework and guidelines for HEIs and study programs in their approach to developing and improving quality;
- (b) to be used effectively in the process of quality external evaluation by both the agency and HEIs.

The process of evaluation process includes:

(i) **a self-evaluation** (assessment) report by the provider on the quality assurance process (subject of the quality assurance process) in view of its mission and objectives. The ARACIS Guide specifies for self-evaluation the need for clarity and synthetic presentation, allowing the institution/study program to use the framework of the format report as a platform for introducing its own ideas and comments. The self-evaluation report is expected to be objective and be supported by the evidence made available for documenting that self-analysis. The expectation is that the self-evaluation is as analytical as possible, identifying both strengths and weaknesses. This should be the outcome of an on-going internal process that involves staff, students and stakeholders. According to the Law, the quality domains and criteria taken as references are: institutional capacity, educational effectiveness and quality management.

(ii) **an external evaluation** (assessment) by a panel of independent experts selected from the ARACIS register of external evaluators, avoiding possible conflict of interests situations; the panel includes, as appropriate, student member(s) and international evaluator(s) for all institutional evaluations; site visits are obligatory for all evaluations. Site visits are planned well in advance and the calendar and actions are agreed upon by the panel and representatives of the institution or study program.

(iii) **the drafting and then publication of a report** including decisions, recommendations and formal outcomes, including the final summative judgment; **Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.** Before proceeding to draft a report on the site visit, the visit panel presents the evidence found during the site-visit to the representatives of the provider, without entering into the formulation of final decisions.

For Study programs evaluations the draft report of the panel is submitted firstly to the Permanent Specialty Commission in charge with the study domain in order to assure that the procedures applied and the contents of the report are in line with the regulations and consistent with decisions taken in other comparable evaluations. In case certain points do not seem to be well documented, the institution or study program is invited to further the evidence.

In order to make sure that the conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though preliminary reports are formed by groups of different people, the Departments of accreditation and of External quality evaluation of the agency are consulted, before the proposals for both study programs and/or institutional evaluations are presented to the Council for the final judgment. Both departments include Council members, with the exception of the President and Vice-President, and one of the student members of the Council. The draft-report of the corresponding Department is presented to the ARACIS Council for analysis and endorsement. After approval by the Council the report is made public. A follow-up policy is proposed by the provider after considering the recommendations from the report. ARACIS co-operates with the education provider for finalizing the follow-up measures which are to be implemented during a pre-established period, generally one year.

The Law, the Methodology and Guides support the follow-up procedure, as it predetermined and applied by ARACIS, as per ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures. **The follow-up procedure** aims to review actions taken by the provider in the light of the recommendations formulated in the report, in case the recommendations require a subsequent action plan. When such an action plan is not considered, as it is the case of the highest “*degree of confidence*” quality judgment awarded to an institution or study program, the follow-up procedure is considered after three years in the form of a short visit to the institution as well in the annual meetings of ARACIS with representatives of the National Rectors’ Council.

The proposed new quality assurance project mentioned in this SER is expected to clarify also to what extent more detailed follow-up procedures need to be implemented when the external evaluation has found a very good quality level, in correlation with the development of a “benchmarking culture”, without contributing to the “quality evaluation fatigue” on institutions.

(iv) Since the **agency makes formal quality assurance decisions with conclusions which have then formal consequences, it has an appeals procedure.**

The appeals procedure is published on the site of the agency. (see Annex 12) and http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie-Proceduri/Appeal_proceedings_Modifications_of_the_Guide_-_Part_III_.pdf)

After publication of the *Agency's External institutional evaluation report* on ARACIS website, if the institution considers that there are reasons of the type mentioned above, it may make an appeal in writing against the rating given by the agency, *within maximum two weeks since its publication*, by means of a letter registered to the agency within the mentioned date. Usually, not later than 30 days since receipt of the appeal, the **ARACIS Council's Executive Board** reviews the report and invites the university rector and the contact person for a discussion of clarification. If after discussion, the university representatives consider that the agency's report is based on

real and documented evidence, the appeal may be withdrawn in writing and the *Agency's External institutional evaluation report* published on the website shall be deemed approved in its original form.

If, after this discussion, the university representatives maintain their appeal or if they do not wish to participate in the discussion, the appeal is settled in accordance with the methodology. If an appeal is received, the duration of the evaluation period is extended by right for the necessary period to resolve the appeal. **ARACIS Council's Executive Board** specifies the nature of the appeal respectively classifies it within one of the categories *Appeals relating to procedural flaws* or *Appeals relating to issues of ethics*, and appoints a speciality inspector to make a preliminary analysis of the file.

Reporting procedures will be described in detail when under the presentation of compliance with ESG 2.5 – Reporting.

ARACIS has been constantly committed to achieving in a professional manner the requirements of evaluation processes. Among the strategies that have been so far used are:

- (i) a member of the ARACIS Council negotiates with the rector of the institution the calendar and the process, and remains in charge to make sure the procedure is strictly followed until the preparation of the report;
- (ii) in selecting the evaluation panel, due attention is paid to achieving a balance and maintaining a high level of competence, as well as avoiding conflicts of interests;
- (iii) the evaluation is consistently made with reference to predefined criteria and standards. The key shortcoming of the new approach based on learning outcomes is, as already stated, the overall weak academic culture of operating with learning outcomes. It is in this respect that ARACIS will invest much of its future work related to the operations of the qualifications framework.

3.8 - Accountability procedures

Standard: Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

Guidelines: These procedures are expected to include the following:

- 1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;**
- 2. Documentation which demonstrates that:**
 - **the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance**
 - **the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts**

- the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties
- the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (ie means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/Board); an internal reflection mechanism (ie means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (ie means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.

3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

ARACIS Compliance

ARACIS operates within the requirements set by Romanian legislation. Based on this legislation, ARACIS adopted rules and regulations to assure transparency of its work. All relevant documents are emphasizing the internal quality assurance of the institution and are published and available on the website.

At the same time, ARACIS developed clear documents revealing the fact that the agency's activities are oriented towards its mission and goals of quality assurance.

In order to avoid all conflict-of-interest situations, there are clear and improved mechanisms to avoid potential conflicts of interests which are put in place. Also, in relation to that aspect, the Code of Ethics was revised, with the implementing of a new “no conflict of interest” (or “independence”) clause to be signed by evaluators.

With regard to the internal quality assurance processes, in order to improve all internal quality assurance procedures, the agency has developed an Internal Quality Assurance Manual of Procedures covering all the administrative aspects of the current activities (see Annex 13). The internal QA system is now clearly described. The full implementation is now gradually in progress. Thus, the internal feedback is of outmost importance for the ARACIS management and there are periodical meetings with the staff and relevant stakeholders. Following input from staff, several improvements of the internal procedures were proposed and implemented after approval of the Council. Also, in terms of external feedback, many of the recommendations made by relevant stakeholders were taken into account and the Board members of the Council as well as the Council as a whole remain in close contact with rectors, the Education Committees of the Parliament and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Research.

The Executive Board of ARACIS holds periodic meetings with permanent staff to collect feedback, to understand better the current problems trying to improve the activity or solve the problems. As already mentioned in this report, several permanent staff participated in study visits organized by the agency to our ENQA partner agencies in order to help with the

understanding of other European experiences in quality assurance in higher education and application of the ESGs.

A very complex study regarding the ARACIS activity in the Romanian educational context (universities' opinions, students' opinions, ARACIS external evaluators' opinions, representatives of the labour market etc.) was realized in 2010 and made public in the Quality Barometer (see Annex 9). ARACIS used this study to improve some standards, performance indicators and activities in the new Methodology for external evaluation proposed to the MEN. As for the mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years, this criterion is being fulfilled through this self-evaluation report.

The members of the ARACIS Council, external evaluators and also some staff members participated in many events organized by ENQA, CEENQA or INQAAHE to be aware with what it is happening concerning quality assurance in higher education at the international level. The trainings organized by ENQA for external evaluators, for the agencies which prepare the self-evaluation reports or meetings for internal quality assurance at the agencies level (staff development) were very useful for our agency. ARACIS is also member of QAN (Quality Audit Network), a non-formal network which proposes to increase the collaboration between agencies for institutional evaluations and also to share experiences and good practices. ARACIS was partner in the ENQA Project 2010-2012 – ProENQA.

ARACIS actively participates in the ENQA Working Groups on Excellence, Implementation and Staff Development.

ARACIS is also a partner organisation in the project Quest for Quality for Students (QUEST), project developed by European Students' Union. QUEST try to identify a true European student viewpoint on quality and the ways to enhance it through an European student survey, to explore the possibilities to promote change by targeting the rapid capacity building of student unions in order for them to lead student centred discussions on quality.

3. Compliance with Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines

This section of the self-evaluation itemises the individual standards and guidelines of the ESG, which are followed by ARACIS account of the way in which it meets them, together with the sources of relevant evidence. The paragraph numbers of each standard of the ESG are those used in the ESG.

2.1 - Use of internal quality assurance procedures

Standard: “External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines”.

Guidelines: The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions’

own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met.

If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

ARACIS Compliance

In the EHEA external quality assurance evaluation procedures start from the assumption of confidence in the effectiveness of internal quality assurance procedures. Thus, the main and most important document from which the external evaluation of a higher education institution starts is the institutional/study program Self Evaluation Report (SER). Understanding the external evaluation as a constructive process makes self evaluation the most important part of it.

As a consequence of many years of experience, more and more universities understand that evaluations (internal or external) are not to demonstrate that the quality of educational/research processes is perfect but quality assurance in higher education should become and remain an on-going process in the context of dynamic society and economic environment.

One of the main tasks of ARACIS was to determine the main approach for the definition of quality and relate it to the universities internal quality assurance processes. To this aim, consultation of academic and other stakeholders was very important as well as taking into account and presenting the international standards, guidelines (ESG) and definitions, and making a set of concepts acceptable throughout the system.

As shown before, the ARACIS external evaluation is focused, according to the Law, on three quality domains: Institutional capacity, Educational effectiveness and *Quality management*.

Following the requirements of ESG 2.1, each HEI has an Internal Commission in charge of QA, under the coordination of the Rector. The QA Commissions must have policies, a database and specific internal QA procedures, while considering the ESG as an important reference for internal QA. Also, involvement of the professional world in internal quality assurance procedures of HE institutions gained in relevance and effectiveness, as ARACIS encouraged initiatives to structurally improve the position of these QA-structures, and thus increase further development of quality culture and to include participation of all stakeholders, especially from the world of employment. The projects that ARACIS has undertaken with European funding were taken as positive steps towards this situation, thus contributing to strengthen the quality culture within Romanian HEIs and strengthening the relevant QA- structures within HEIs, e.g. by promoting an actively approach and by increasing the number of quality assurance - events and debates within institutions.

As QA should always be internally driven (even if there are external incentives) and aimed at enhancing the quality of activities - usually through recommendations for further action - and therefore foster a quality culture. One of ARACIS objectives is to help universities understand better that the aim of quality evaluation (internal or external) is not to demonstrate to “the public” that the educational process is perfect. Quality assurance in higher education is a

dynamic process in the context of a dynamic society – we have quoted many times Peter Williams, former President of ENQA who said that “in higher education for quality assurance the journey is probably more important than the destination”.

At the same time, ARACIS developed a number of other initiatives, described below, to promote internal quality assurance within universities, supported by European funding.

As a reminder, we note that as early as the period 2007 - 2008, ARACIS developed a Matra project – NEQ (Network for Higher Education Quality) with the scope to promote and sustain quality assurance and evaluation in the Romanian higher education system through the creation of a quality assurance national network, based on best-practices and policy transfers from the Dutch partner in the project (Dutch Inspectorate of Higher Education). One of the most important events taking place yearly in Romania is the *Institutional Strategic Quality Management* Organized by the Technical University “Gh.Asachi” of Iasi, in which the networking is effective and on a permanent basis, at the initiative of a university.

ARACIS continued to support the improvement of internal quality assurance systems for higher education institutions in Romania throughout the ACADEMIS project, implemented during the 2008-2011 period, in which an important number of internal evaluators from the universities were trained (representatives of Quality Assurance Departments of Romanian universities) in order to assure a link between internal and external quality assurance.

In parallel, from 2009 ARACIS is partner of a project proposed by the Medical University “Iuliu Hatieganu” of Cluj-Napoca. The scope of the project - *Specific standards and Performance Indicators for Health Higher Education* comes from the fact that study programs organized at medicine and pharmacy universities are different from other forms of higher education, most of them preparing the graduates to work in regulated professions in the EU. This element has required the development and application of specific standards, both in the internal and external quality evaluations. The project aims to build a rigorous quality evaluation tool, in which specific and detailed quality requirements at European standards are mentioned. These requirements must be met by health higher education institutions and research programs offered by these institutions, thus developing a common reference system that is able to improve the educational offer in this field of study. A series of studies and analyses will still be made, regarding the situations in the medicine and pharmacy universities. As a second step, a set of specific standards will be elaborated, to be implemented in the consortium universities and adopted by the ARACIS Council, as a national evaluation tool of the health higher education quality. Monitoring will be performed, in order to apply and disseminate the new standards. The expected benefits of developing these new, specific, quality standards are multiple: putting into place of an internal review mechanism and continuous improvement of results and academic performance; enabling inter-comparability of university performance; increased credibility on the labor market of the graduates.

ARACIS Council performed thorough SWOT analysis, in order to plan ahead all the changes needed to enhance the internal and external quality of the agency, thus playing a major role in the development of the quality culture in Romanian HE system.

2.2 - Development of external quality assurance processes

Standard: The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

Guidelines: In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used.

As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

ARACIS Compliance

The Romanian legislation, methodology and ARACIS guides create an extensive set of documentation on which the ARACIS QA-activities are built. The ARACIS Methodology is focused on the external evaluation. ARACIS Guides (<http://www.aracis.ro/en/procedures/>), made available to the institutions, offer significant practical information on the procedures for quality evaluation, emphasising the evaluation of learning outcomes as well as on a broader set of other standards and outcomes of institutional teaching and learning activities, making thus a big difference from the previous approach which was focused mostly on inputs. This observation refers obviously to both internal and external evaluation processes, requiring HEIs to make operational the new approach, and for external evaluators to really consider the implications of focusing on outcomes. By publishing the Law, the Methodology and the ARACIS Guide, and by providing universities with the whole set of documents containing the aims and objectives of quality assurance processes, which has enabled them to develop their internal QA departments and procedures, clarity and transparency of procedures and methods is assured. It is important to stress out the fact that all those documents were constantly improved over the last years and were also translated into English, published and made available to evaluation panels in order to facilitate the activity of the foreign evaluators. Training procedures for evaluators, including student evaluators, were developed and improved and are consistently applied.

Periodical meetings with university leadership and staff responsible with QA in universities were organized between 2008 and 2011, especially under the ACADEMIS Project. Several training sessions for internal evaluators coming from accredited HEIs were organized. The speakers selected for the trainings were the most experienced external evaluators of ARACIS, thus setting

common bases for reporting and communication between the evaluators and the academic structures which were evaluated (study programs or institutions). This initiative was welcomed by the institutions as bureaucracy is very much reduced and interference with current activities of institutions was reduced. However, there is a common understanding of ARACIS and institutions that this process should continue. To this end, ARACIS is implementing its own electronic platform for data collection supported financially from EU structural funds.

Also, during the training sessions and dissemination meetings held periodically, ARACIS took into account the importance of the input of different stakeholders, such as employers. ARACIS invited all interested parties to attend those meetings, thus creating a favorable path of communication between HEIs and the employers. Therefore, in order to insure **participation of stakeholders** in view to incorporate views from outside the academic community the agency took action and organized its own Standing commission of employers, including members representing different sectors of the economic and social activity, such as engineering, economists etc. The members of the Standing commission of the employers are already participating in evaluation of some Licenta study programs and this activity will be extended to Master and Doctoral programs. Now, as the completion of the self-certification of the National Framework of Qualifications (2011) in higher education this activity is continuing with the aim of ensuring better co-ordination of the expected and achieved learning outcomes of study programmes with the vision of the employers.

2.3 - Criteria for decisions

Standard: Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

Guidelines: Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

ARACIS Compliance

The criteria for decisions have been disseminated and widely debated, being in accordance to the mission statement of the agency of assessing the quality of study programs and institutions. Evidence based views are to be expressed by the external evaluators and both the criteria and the documentation necessary for the evaluation are referred to in the contract signed with the externally evaluated HEI. The analysis is based on the SER and on the results of a site visit. There are several steps in making a final decision.

Evaluation of study programs (Licenta -Bachelor)

The panel of program evaluators (three members, one of the evaluators is member of the permanent specialty commission) receive and study the SER before the site visit. Following the site-visit they present in writing to the permanent specialty commission the results and facts found during the site-visit, in which agreement between the self-evaluation report and reality is of crucial importance. The permanent specialty commission includes uneven number (usually nine) representatives of a study domain. The role of the permanent specialty commission is very important for the *consistency of the decisions*, as the same study program can be initiated or already currently offered by several HEIs. This commission judges and decides also whether or not if the activities and interaction with the representatives of the university during the visit closely followed the correct procedures, evaluates the consistency of the documents with the conclusions of the visit report and makes a proposal based on the findings and recommendations of the panel and on its own scrutiny of the documents and facts. The report is then forwarded to the Department of accreditation, which verifies and validates the procedure, and then is presented to the Council.

The ARACIS Council examines the report, the processes and procedures and takes the final decision. The presentation in the Council is meant to contribute to moderating conclusions, if necessary. The decision of the Council is made known to the institution, then sent to the Ministry of National Education and made public. There is also in place a procedure of appeals against a final decision, open to a HEI which is not satisfied with the procedures or the decision. In this case, according to the nature of the appeal, a new panel, including other evaluators, may be requested to examine the contents of the appeal letter and may proceed with an additional evaluation. When this second evaluation is completed, the panel informs the Council about the conclusion, which validates the final decision. For study program evaluation, three levels of judgments on confidence remain in place, as they have proven to describe with reasonable accuracy the differences in quality: **confidence**, **limited confidence** and **no confidence**.

Evaluation of study programs (Master)

Evaluation of Master study programs was performed following the same principles, with two evaluators performing the sit-visit. This difference is justified by the fact that institutions are allowed to initiate or run master level study programs only if they have already in place accredited Licenta level study programs, which is considered to be in itself an evidence of the institutional capability of the study domain in terms of staff, resources etc. Now, a new legal provision requires evaluation of master programs and Master study domains, following a procedure which is not yet finalized but work is in progress to this end. The agency has proposed a draft form to the Ministry of National Education, which is currently examining it in order to finalize together with ARACIS the final form to be approved by Government decision, according to the legal provisions.

Evaluation of higher education institutions

For the institutional evaluations, the visit panel is larger and includes institutional evaluators and study program evaluators for a minimum of 20% of study programs selected from the total number of accredited programs offered by the HEI. The work of the visit panel, including

student-evaluators, and foreign evaluators include examination of the evidence against the information contained in the self-evaluation report, recording this evidence, writing conclusions and reporting. The experts' panel comprises also one scientific secretary of the panel, who assists the evaluators in the process and is usually one of the professional staff of the agency. The institution is informed in writing by a comprehensive letter about the findings and preliminary conclusions of the evaluation and is given the possibility to react, also in writing, in a specified time interval. As part of the procedure for moderating conclusions, the documents, including all the reports, are forwarded to the Department of external quality assurance evaluation which verifies and validates the procedure and drafts its own report, which integrates the findings of the evaluators, including the students and the foreign experts. All the documents are then presented to the Council. The ARACIS Council examines the reports, the processes and procedures and takes the final decision. The final report of the Council and the decisions, including the level of confidence (or "judgment") awarded to the institution and to the study programs which were evaluated are shared with the institution and made public on the ARACIS website together with the specific follow-up procedures. The decision of the Council is shared with the institution, is sent to the Ministry of National Education and made public. Within the ACADEMIS project, where 46 accredited HEIs were externally evaluated, a brochure was published for each of these universities and was distributed both to the HEIs, some copies being kept into the ARACIS library. At the same time, these brochures were published on the ARACIS website.

A difficult task following an external evaluation proved to be that of formulating the final judgment with regard to external confidence in institutional quality. Initially the Methodology included three levels of judgments on confidence for institutional evaluations: high degree of confidence, limited degree of confidence and lack of confidence. These three levels of confidence proved not to be differentiating enough, neglecting many nuances and variations.

This derived from the fact that quality is a comprehensive concept which may take certain shapes and values when the institution as a whole is considered. Variations are even more important when study programs and research performance are also brought into the framework. In order to cope with this situation, the Council of ARACIS decided to use four levels of judgments on confidence, starting with external evaluations which were initiated in 2009: **high degree of confidence; confidence; limited degree of confidence and lack of confidence.**

The appeals procedures have been more clearly described, as it can be found in the *Part III – Academic quality external evaluation of accredited higher education institution*, published on the website of the agency

Another aspect that needs to be stressed-out is the fact that, acknowledging the importance of even more consistent evaluations, as the study programs and HEIs are more and more complex these days, the ARACIS Council developed also the inter-panel consultation, and a new Methodology was drafted and proposed to the Ministry of National Education within the ACADEMIS project, which is more qualitative and learning outcomes oriented than the previous.

For all ARACIS external evaluations it is very important to make sure that the conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner. Even though the preliminary reports are drafted by groups of different people, the Departments of accreditation and of External quality evaluation of the agency are consulted, before the proposals for both study programs and/or institutional evaluations are presented to the Council for the final judgment. The draft-report of the corresponding Department is presented to the ARACIS Council for analysis and endorsement. After being discussed and approved by the Council the report is made public.

2.4 - Processes fit for purpose

Standard: All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

Guidelines: Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance.

Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- *insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task*
- *the exercise of care in the selection of experts*
- *the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts*
- *the use of international experts*
- *participation of students*
- *ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached*
- *the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review*
- *recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality*

ARACIS Compliance

According to the law, the general objective of the activity of ARACIS is to assure and improve the quality of the Romanian higher education system, in order to make Romanian diplomas trustworthy in Europe and internationally. The quality assurance system consists of self evaluation reports, site visits, accreditation reports and decisions and tries to go even further in reaching this objective.

The aims and objectives set for ARACIS by the Law determine the nature and content of the processes and activities which were designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve them.

As presented before, the activities of ARACIS include, according to the Law:

- **institutional Quality Assurance evaluation**, which is either periodic (every five years) for accredited institutions or in view of accrediting an institution provisionally authorized to function/provisionally authorizing a new institution to enable it to start functioning as higher education provider; (nine evaluations in progress actually and 95 evaluations performed during the 2008-2012 period for periodic (cyclical) evaluation and three evaluations for institutional accreditation);

- **study programs evaluation, which is either periodic** (cyclical - every five years) or for accreditation/provisional authorizing as a first stage of accreditation for Licenta level study programs;

- **study programs evaluation for provisional authorization and accreditation;**

- **master programs accreditation;**

- **study programs for teacher training** in higher education institutions, in view of accreditation and evaluation.

The processes and activities are differentiated in order to best fit their purposes. In the same time, whereas the structure of criteria and quality standards is specified by the Law, the Methodology in use is fitted for purpose accordingly, keeping into account the differences between the types of evaluations. For instance, additional performance indicators are specified for accreditation, most of them related to teaching staff, the eligibility for accreditation of Bachelor programs needs a longer time interval after provisional authorizing and they are associated with a special follow-up monitoring and reporting activity.

The role of evaluators is of outmost importance in this process. *The provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts was offered by several periodic* training sessions organized by ARACIS (Annex 14) for academic experts under the framework of the ACADEMIS project or supported from the own resources of the agency.

As already stated, ARACIS has already organized, starting in 2008 and continuing in the following four years, extensive training sessions for its own listed evaluators (experts) and, in addition, trained also 300 internal evaluators (at university level, as part of creating a quality culture, to improve the quality of QA activities and quality of self-evaluation reports for programs and at institutional level). An electronic tool has been developed for on-line evaluation of Romanian experts, in preparation for the intense activity over the last years.

To improve quality, of both the external evaluators listed in the Register of external evaluators of ARACIS and the internal evaluators, ARACIS published a *Manual for evaluating quality of university study programs (Manualul evaluatorului calitatii programelor de studii universitare)* authored by leading experts from ARACIS Register of evaluators. The external evaluators followed several training sessions supported by the agency from its own resources and from the abovementioned ACADEMIS project. For the the training sessions purposes, a 687 pages *Course support for the training sessions of evaluators* was published, authored by 32 ARACIS

leading evaluators and members of permanent Speciality commissions) and was made available in Romanian to the participants in printed form and on the website. At these trainings were present as trainees, both students and academic evaluators, as well as representatives of stakeholders from the professional field.

An electronic facility has been developed and implemented which allows the agency to test the level of understanding of the QA procedures of the agency of all the external evaluators, local and from abroad, who expresses the wish to take part in evaluation of study programs and higher education institutions. Following this testing, which took place in electronic form, in three sessions (one month each), the number of evaluators in the register is now of 1333 (see <http://pfe.aracis.ro/cms/>). After a period in which the content was improved, the platform was recently re-opened and made available to applicants.

ARACIS also implements presently a European funded Project - *EEducation system for quality evaluation in Romanian higher education – SeECIS*, an EEducation system that will allow the conception and presentation of a curriculum updating in a digital form (specific for ARACIS activities, as a result of the tasks presented in the current legislation) and on-line/off-line access to these materials. The overall objective of the project is to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of training those involved in the process of external assessment of the quality in higher education: external evaluators, members of specialized committees, ARACIS Council, ARACIS staff and persons from the universities involved in this process. *The overall objective will be achieved by:*

- Increasing of the training effectiveness: specific eEducation techniques for teaching and testing the knowledge, the possibility of automatic return or at student's initiative on course materials, increasing flexibility of course scenarios, easy access to related concepts, increase interactivity between course participants (in case of synchronicity - virtual classroom).
- Increasing the training efficiency: developing multiple use of course materials without additional consumption, facilitating and simplifying access to learning methods without an instructor, distance education, asynchronous methods of training.
- Increasing transparency of external evaluation processes of ARACIS

As a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance and, in order to become more relevant and competitive at international level, *the use of international experts is current practice*. They are briefed in advance on the procedures, criteria, standards and performance indicators of used by the agency as well on the importance of understanding the local context. The SER is also made available to them with one month before the evaluation mission starts. International experts participate in all external quality assurance evaluation missions at institutional level. Their findings are included in the panel report and are also published as a full independent document.

The selection of evaluators (experts) is performed based on their competence and appropriate skills, which are the result of individual study of the legal provisions, ARACIS Methodology and

Guide, participation at training sessions organized by ARACIS. The activity of the experts is permanently monitored and verified, and the results have already led to a number of changes in the composition of the visit panels and of the permanent specialty commissions. Further monitoring of the skills of evaluators (experts) is being performed by using the aforementioned electronic tool.

At the same time, *stakeholders* and *students* are included in the evaluation panels. ARACIS is in permanent contact with the student organizations with the aim to organize joint training sessions including students and faculty evaluators. The mentioned training sessions for students and professors were partly organized in joint induction seminars, allowing thus to build trust and connections between the two groups of evaluators.

Student unions organize also their training sessions for which ARACIS provides support in terms of funding some activities and sending Council members and experts as speakers.

The subjects of the training sessions and of the electronic facilities for the evaluators are based on the concept of *the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review*. The afore-mentioned improvement of the electronic platform for evaluators was meant to up-date the practical example included, including a “model SER” with more relevance. The training hands-on sessions for evaluators, academics, students or employers, were designed and run to *ensure that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached*.

During the last period ARACIS work insisted towards strengthening the culture of **institutional improvement and enhancement**, and all elements of the QA-processes (indicators, self evaluation reports, evaluators etc.) were oriented to his aim. Stakeholders like employers play now a greater role in the evaluation and QA process and the criteria and guides have been constantly reviewed and improved.

The most relevant evidence in the sense of **recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality** is the result of follow-up external evaluation procedures meant to identify the outcome of correction measures taken at the level of study program/institutions in order to enhance quality and, if sustained by adequate proof, to improve the judgment on the level of quality. Following additional evaluation, a number of more than 200 study programs and 13 universities proved that their initial their quality judgment fulfilled the conditions for being improved (for instance, for study programs, from limited degree of confidence to confidence etc.).

2.5 - Reporting

Standard: Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

Guidelines: In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone.

In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations.

There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions.

Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers.

Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

ARACIS Compliance

Any QA evaluation is followed by a report which is initially drafted by the panel of evaluators, analyzed by the permanent specialty commission for all the study programs belonging to the study domain, in order to make sure that the report is consistent, based on evidence and structured as to cover description, analysis, conclusions and recommendations. Since reporting is closely related to criteria for decision, a quite detailed description of the sequence of reporting procedure has been already introduced at ESG 2.3. All the reports discussed and endorsed by the ARACIS Council are sent to the evaluated HEIs and then made public in written form and on the ARACIS website. In written form, a copy is also sent to the Ministry of National Education and a press release is also made public. Reports following an institutional evaluation were also published as brochures in a relevant number of copies. Program reports in written form cannot be published as brochures due to prohibitive cost constraints, since there are in very large numbers (at the moment this self-evaluation report was written the total of study programs evaluated is of more than 5700 (See Annex 7). The fact that this situation was probably not very clearly explained has led to a statement included in one previous external evaluation report include the observation that not all the reports are published but they are made available only on request. This is obviously not the case, because all the reports are immediately made public in electronic form, which can be found on the ARACIS website at any time. This procedure has been judged by the academic community and the public as an acceptable solution because raising the costs of evaluation to cope with higher and higher printing costs would reflect in the level of evaluation fees paid by the institutions themselves for programs.

It is stipulated by Law that the report and the decision should be firstly communicated to the HEI, which can appeal them in certain respects. This is done by ARACIS for both program and institutional evaluations. When the report and the decision are finalized, they are made public and transmitted to the Ministry of National Education for legal follow-up. Normally, not later than the end of month of May of each year, the Ministry publishes the list of provisionally

authorized and accredited HEIs and study programs to inform HE candidates before the students' admission period for the next academic year.

Over the last period of time, ARACIS re-analyzed its reporting policy and procedures and included in the trainings of the evaluators elements on how to write a report, to make reports more "reader friendly" and accessible to the wide public. As already stated in this report, one major achievement is the fact that for institutional evaluations, which are more complex, additional technical support was created by the appointment of the scientific secretaries, which led to a more consistent procedure of the report-writing process, making sure that all the evaluators contribute to the panel report which is drafted in the final form by the panel co-ordinator. As mentioned before, all documents are available on the website of the agency, which has led to a quite satisfactory situation where there were no complaints about the contents of the reports from both authors and readers.

Reports following system-wide analyses were drafted and published under the framework of the ACADEMIS project. These include topics such as: A Synthetic Image: Indicators and Scores, Academic Statistics, Distribution of Perceptions about Higher Education, Gaps and Differences in Education Quality, Gaps and Differences on Perspectives and Relations, Representations on ARACIS etc. It is noteworthy to mention that the reports include not only facts and figures but also elements which are meant to improve the quality assurance activity of both externally evaluated institutions or of the Agency. Self-criticism included in the reports aims to stimulate development of internal quality assurance procedures of the Agency and improve fitness-for-purpose.

In order to make more accessible and usefulness the external evaluation reports and also the informations provided by the universities for the external evaluation (institutional or study programme), ARACIS developed also a database with following: specifications **Input indicators**, for institution resources: Human resources; Logistics; Financial resources; **Process indicators**, for educational, research and administrative processes (i.e. educational technologies, academic counseling services etc.); **Output indicators**, which estimate the results of the educational, research and administrative processes (i.e. the number of degrees issued, the number of invention patents or papers published in academic journals etc.); **Outcome indicators**, which estimate the results and impact of the activity of the higher education institutions (i.e. effects on the labor market, increased productivity in a specific economic sector etc.).

2.6- Follow up-procedures

Standard: Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Guidelines: Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: it should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

ARACIS Compliance

The Law and the ARACIS Methodology and Guide provide for ARACIS the task to set follow-up procedures and demands for the implementation of recommendations. Following the periodic (cyclical) evaluation of a HEI, when the situation demands it, according to paragraph 3.2, d in the Methodology, the recommendations could be followed-up by a “work plan” which is initially drafted by the HEI and then agreed upon with the ARACIS panel and Council. The “work plan” has specific provisions and deadlines for implementation. The duration of implementation is at least one academic year, and during this period ARACIS is required also to nominate a visit panel and visit the HEI. The new evaluation is of a summative type and focuses specifically on how the recommendations have been implemented. In case of a HEI failing to implement them in due time, as specified by the law, ARACIS informs the Ministry of National Education, which takes decisions according to the legislation.

In other cases, when the Ministry has been notified by the Agency about the outcome of an evaluation which clearly demonstrates that an HE institution has repeatedly failed to meet quality standards, or at its own ministerial initiative - following other types of information (press releases, complaints, judiciary action etc.), ARACIS can be asked to proceed with special monitoring procedures for a specified time interval. Currently, ARACIS provided such procedures for two higher education institutions.

De facto, monitoring quality assurance activities by ARACIS is permanent also because the evaluation of the programs is not performed in the same time. The time sequencing of study programs evaluations throughout the whole period between successive institutional external evaluations is such that most institutions are visited, at a period of 3-4 months, by an evaluation panel from ARACIS, which focuses at least on one particular study program. In such occasion, the university is also asked to provide data about the internal processes of quality assurance at institutional level. Thus, institutional cyclical re-evaluation focuses primarily on value-added and the functioning of internal quality assurance system.

In the same time, every year, according to the law, universities produce an internal quality assurance report and an analysis of the previous report, from the point of view of institutional and program levels. ARACIS evaluation commissions check the existence and implementation of these reports, as a proof of real functionality of the internal quality assurance system.

Since 2009, regular meetings of ARACIS Council members with university representatives take place, organized in different parts of the country. The goal of these meetings was to disseminate the results at system level, to discuss about certain problems faced by universities in implementing measure plans, in order to ensure continuity of internal quality assurance process. These meetings were very well appreciated by universities and they requested ARACIS to continue this activity. In the "follow-up" process, ARACIS focuses on the quality of "partnership" in its relationship with the universities.

Thus, further meetings with institutional or program representatives are organized also in institutions which, after external evaluation, have obtained either High degree of confidence or Confidence. These meetings can embrace several forms: formal short site-visit after three years from the date the Report was made public, participation of ARACIS at academic or research events organized by the institution, meetings with the university leaders with ARACIS representatives etc. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged. When appropriate, some of the recommendations are of an informal type: request for supplementary information, minor corrections in curricula and staffing, etc.

Even when the quality judgment was "Confidence", the institution can apply for a second evaluation, within the time interval between the legal one (cycle: five years), in order to up-grade it, namely to High degree of confidence.

Following institutional evaluations and based on the rating obtained, 13 of the higher education institutions have been evaluated twice during 2008-2013 as the procedure required or upon their own request, not all of them being however able to obtain a higher rating.

With regard to accreditation, once a HEI or a study program has been *provisionally authorized* (as the first stage of accreditation, according to the Law), the institution or the study program is subject to an annual monitoring process, including drafting and sending ARACIS the aforementioned annual internal quality assurance reports. After a period of time of two years after graduation of the first promotion, the educational provider which is authorized must request accreditation and is obliged by the Law to follow the procedure leading to the granting (or not) of the status of accreditation. The follow-up is thus on-going, permanent and aims for constant quality enhancement.

2.7 - Periodic reviews

Standard: External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

Guidelines: Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not 'once in a lifetime'. It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent

external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

ARACIS Compliance

As previously mentioned, according to the Law, the accredited HEIs are legally bound to an external quality evaluation every five years (periodic, cyclical review). This process started already in fall 2006, with drafting and approving the Methodology, and in 2007 the first nine state universities and two private ones were evaluated externally by ARACIS. In fall 2008 ARACIS started implementing a project funded from the European structural funds, under which in the period 2008-2011 were externally evaluated 46 accredited HEIs (37 public universities and 9 private universities) on a voluntary basis. The activities performed as part of this project consolidated the ARACIS approaches, expertise, communication with universities, on one side, and, on the other side, strengthened quality culture in universities by implication of many other university staff, not only the institutional leadership. In addition to those evaluations, other institutional evaluation processes were performed, raising the total number of completed institutional evaluations to 81.

The review (evaluation) procedures in place, corresponding to the Law and Methodology, have been made public and discussed with the HE institutions.

Also, the process of evaluating the study programs which have been authorized and/or accredited by ARACIS over the last years, on the basis of the current Methodology is continuing

The periodicity of the evaluation of the study programs is related with the rating obtained. The normal cyclical period is every five years, but ARACIS took the decision that for some programs which do not meet the quality criteria or that have not achieved a certain level of progress, in accordance to the mission and potential of the institution, a new evaluation should be performed within a two years period.

According with the Law of National Education, the evaluation of Master cycle should also include evaluation of Master domains, every five years. ARACIS proposed to Ministry of National Education a new Methodology for Master domains evaluation. It is expected that ARACIS will start soon this new activity. Cyclical Master programs evaluation continues to be part of periodical institutional evaluation and in this way ARACIS re-evaluated a large number of Master programs.

At the same time, ARACIS is partner in another EU funded project dealing with the analysis of internationalized master programs, implemented by Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. The aim of this project is to try to develop two major tools, both for ARACIS and the universities, such as the establishment of specific criteria to be met, alongside the general ones, by all master programs that will carry the "internationalized" mention, as well as the establishment of internal evaluation tools for the higher education institutions that intend to offer such master programs.

2.8 - System-wide analysis

Standard: Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analyzing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

Guidelines: All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

ARACIS Compliance

By law, ARACIS has to perform such an analysis every three years. The development of the **system-wide analyses** started in 2009. The first “Quality Assurance Barometer – the Status of Quality in Romanian higher education” was made public in November 2009, the second “Barometer” in January 2011 and the final and third one in November 2011. Also, the yearly reports of the agency include reference to the results of institutional and study program evaluation at system level. The results are made public through publications, participation to quality assurance Forums and conferences as well as in regional Conferences organized to this end in different academic centers. In 2011 seven such events were organized for all 110 accredited universities, under the ACADEMIS project, disseminating the results of the first enterprise of this kind. The results were discussed in view of suggestions from the participants for improving the methodology and for better internal QA procedures within universities to build-up a real quality culture. Based on that, ARACIS has already developed a database, with informations from 46 universities already evaluated in the ACADEMIS Project, which will be extended to all the accredited HEIs in Romania. The data specifications are the following: **Input indicators**, for institution resources: Human resources; Logistics; Financial resources; **Process indicators**, for educational, research and administrative processes (i.e. educational technologies, academic counseling services etc.); **Output indicators**, which estimate the results of the educational, research and administrative processes (i.e. the number of degrees issued, the number of invention patents or papers published in academic journals etc.); **Outcome indicators**, which estimate the results and impact of the activity of the higher education institutions (i.e. effects on the labor market, increased productivity in a specific economic sector etc.).

The current European-funded project *EEducation system for quality evaluation in Romanian higher education – SeECIS* which is being implemented by ARACIS will allow for much more extended data collection in view of developing further research on the evolution of QA exercise outcomes in universities. The resulting information would pave the way for improved and hopefully simplified ARACIS external evaluation methodology and better connection with the

National Qualification Framework in HE in terms of defining improved Learning Outcomes based curricula.

4. Final Remarks and Considerations

The scope of this SER is mainly, as expected, to provide the ENQA co-ordinated panel with information enabling the members to judge upon the level of compliance of the agency to the ESG but also on the progress achieved from the first external evaluation of the agency. However, the ARACIS Council decided to include not only facts and descriptions of procedures but also a self-critical view of the activity of the agency with the aim to let the panel judge upon the availability and wish of ARACIS to improve its procedures based on a SWOT exercise.

4.1 Quality, Quality Assurance and the ESG: an ARACIS view

Defining **quality**, both of education and within education, is not a simple task. Definitions of quality education given by educators, scholars, students, employers or other different stakeholders are significantly different. Not to speak of those given by people involved in setting standard used in the economic life, who have a more specific, product and conformity oriented vision, which is yet another source of potential conflict. During the last half of the decade or even more, since ARACIS started to function, the system-wide analysis performed on the Romanian HE system allowed the definition of some patterns and approaches regarding quality, from different stakeholders involved in or touched by the education process, as follows:

- **From the parents/families points of view**, all responsible parents want for their children the best schools and the best teachers and generally all of us would like to benefit of „the best”. Yet, the question that imposes is what „the best” is? How can we be sure that we really chose „the best”?
- **The teacher’s input into the quality approach is of paramount importance**. Since education implies personal involvement of the teacher, her/his perception of the quality of higher education is inherently influenced from the very beginning by the binomial „expectations – reality” she/he is confronted to. Many students and in general each person strive to become the best, to perform in education, in his/her profession, personal

life etc. To be honest with ourselves, in this first confrontation how often expectations of the learner are overtaken by reality?

- On the other hand, as far as **the institution** is concerned, under the influence of the quest for excellence, as well as of other factors, such the economic factor, the public opinion, mass media etc., higher education institutions became more and more concerned with the on-going discussions about definition and role of quality. Any indication that they might not be top-quality institutions or that they are poorly ranked in one of the many „*league tables*” or „*rankings*” is considered of be an attempt to their status and therefore a direct prejudice brought to them.
- At the same time, **employers** have a different approach on that matter, depending on the size of the company. If small businesses prefer to hire "specialized" or even "experienced!" graduates, for the larger enterprises it matters more the general learning outcomes/skills of graduates. They are willing to see both education and training more flexible and more open for innovation, thus enhancing relationships between skills suppliers and employers, giving priority to the development of institutional leadership, capacity building and quality improvement efforts.
- **The decision-makers/governments.** One common playground of discussion which emerges and permanently re-emerges at national and/or EU level is the „Efficiency of Higher Education”. Although the concept of „*efficiency of HE*” is not clearly defined (in the paper of the EC - *Country Fiche on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Public Expenditure on Tertiary Education* only examples of „in-efficiency are proposed and all come from pre-university education!), it considers almost an exclusive economic parameter. In that sense, quality of HE has a beneficial effect on the quality of highly trained workforce in the EU – including by research, and contributes to the economic development of the EU. Who would dare to flatly challenge this assumption? But, is this everything about the role of quality assurance in higher education? In the end, what education do we want? The Chilean scholar Eugenio Tironi in his book „*El Sueno Chileno*” (The Chilean Dream) relates the answer to “the kind of society we want”.

Once quality of higher education is defined, or some definition of it is accepted, **quality assurance** must be seen as a process leading to quality.

Some answers on what should then be made to lead to a better understanding of the role of **quality assurance** in higher education and these could be given by starting from the purposes of higher education. The Recommendation Rec (2007) 6 by the Committee of Ministers to member states of the Council of Europe, on the public responsibility for higher education and research, prepared by the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR), points to four main purposes of higher education:

- preparation for sustainable employment;
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- personal development;
- the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

These are the overall purposes of higher education and research. In the European Higher Education Area characterized by the diversity and the autonomy of its institutions, each institution may fulfill one or more of a wide range of missions and it may do so at varying levels and degrees.

On the other hand, the dynamics of society induce changes, new requirements and expectations, need for adaptation to fluid realities much over shorter time intervals as before. This is why, the process of encouraging diversity, creativity and curricular innovation, may be carried out by moving the focus from external evaluation to the *internal adoption of quality and to external assistance for quality enhancement*.

Revising the quality assurance philosophy is also necessary. It would be desirable for the *quality-policing* principle to coexist with the *quality enhancement* principle and for the latter to gradually become dominant as the internal institutionalisation of quality increases.

ARACIS is willing to contribute to the work of the E4, co-ordinated by ENQA, to improve the ESG.

ARACIS's functions could thus change gradually from the *hard* ones, focused on control procedures, to *softer* functions, focused more on facilitation and elaboration of recommendations, presentation of good practices etc. rather than control.

Concrete measures would include:

- revising the methodology of external evaluation by ensuring: decentralisation and more focus on *quality enhancement* and less on control; auditing internal quality assurance systems, encouraging and supporting universities in establishing such systems;

- technical assistance from ARACIS in professionalising quality assurance services at university level: training sessions, promoting good practices, assistance in designing quality assurance instruments etc. Thus, ARACIS would undertake to a considerable extent the role of a quality facilitator;

- external evaluations should more and more take into consideration outcomes, but without considering them as the only evidence or substitute of other criteria which determine quality of education.

4.2 SWOT analysis of ARACIS – summary of main findings

The SWOT self-analysis performed by ARACIS, identified a number of strong points, of weak points and also some other external factors and weaknesses, which, although independent of ARACIS can represent additional threats. The agency hopes that, if considered with care and in co-operation with HE institutions and other decision factors they could be turned into benefic opportunities.

Strengths :

- National and International recognition of ARACIS, through membership of ENQA, INQAAHE, CEENQA;
- ARACIS is listed in the EQAR;
- Independence and self-financing;
- Participation and involvement in EU-funded projects, both as beneficiary and as a partner;
- Clear mission, defined and reinforced by the law; ARACIS benefits of a competent Management Team, which allowed the agency to achieve a high level of experience and be involved in many international collaborations. At the same time, throughout the academic activities of the Council members and of the technical staff, the institution is connected round the clock to the realities of the academic world and more and more open to partners from the academic world. The agency holds now **systematic data** on main stakeholders' opinions and perceptions on quality. The objective, empirical data on universities allows for a future more consistent benchmarking exercise and supports now the proposals for improving the current methodology.

The system evaluation provided a **framework for wide consultation** with experts in universities in order to improve the existing methodology and reduce the administrative burden of the external evaluation exercise for both institutions and agency. In many universities the quality assurance procedures, internal and external, contributed to **enhancement of quality**. The most relevant evidence in that sense is the result of follow-up external evaluation procedures meant to identify the outcome of correction measures taken at the level of study program/institutions in order to enhance quality and, if sustained by adequate proof, to improve the judgment on the level of quality. Following additional evaluation, a number of more than 200 study programs and 9 universities proved that their initial their quality judgment fulfilled the conditions for being improved (for instance, for study programs, from "limited degree of confidence" to "confidence" etc.).

- Involvement of students in the evaluation process and good collaboration with the students organizations The active participation of students in external institutional evaluations has contributed to a very high extent to the confidence-building process in quality assurance from the student side. The objective, independent, evaluation of student members of the panels contributed to the quality of reporting and final decision.
- Involvement of employers in the evaluation process and good collaboration with the employers organizations;
- The large number of external evaluators within the National Register of Evaluators;
- Clear procedures for the evaluation, according the ESG, applied in equal measure to the state higher education institutions as well as to the private ones;
- Transparency of decisions, both at the level of study programs as well as the institutional level;
- Positive image at the regional, national and international level. The presence and active **participation of international experts** in institutional external evaluations opened new perspectives for judging quality, especially in the definition of the institutional mission, resources and management;
- Contribution to the development of a "quality culture" in universities - increasing the internal systems role of quality assurance

Weaknesses

The weak point refer also to the *HE education system*, as they were reflected in the Quality barometers, as well as to the *Agency*, since they have to be considered together in order to allow further corrective and developmental measures.

The **weak points** identified in the **HE system** are usually easier to identify and describe than the strong ones. Understanding the reason for their existence and identifying the methods for reducing and/or eliminating them is one of the scopes of the agency, requiring however a certain time to implement the adequate correction measures.

The quality barometers claimed a low level of differentiation among universities with regard to mission, strategies and quality assurance procedures and a high degree of homogeneity and institutional isomorphism in internal organization. In that respect, the agency found some objective reasons, such as because subject-specific universities (i.e. medical, military, technical etc.) are more homogeneous than comprehensive universities, the legislative framework at the moment the “barometers” were drafted etc.

Regarding quality assurance, in many cases the focus in the institutions was on drafting dossiers for accreditation and/or periodic evaluation, inducing formalism and ritualism in the internal quality assurance practices in institutions. The quality assurance practices have not been fully internalized, in many situations remaining decoupled from the teaching/learning and research current activities in the universities. Whereas the involvement of students is achieved in the external evaluation, the agency found it to a much lesser degree in the internal quality assurance procedures.

SERs of higher education institutions still remain too "self-laudative," instead of showing an understanding of the role of self-criticism concepts for QA and the quality enhancement activities.

In many universities internal quality cultures have not yet fully emerged, but rather counter-cultures blaming the excessive bureaucratization of academic activities and indicating a sort of “quality assurance fatigue”. Quality assurance is in some places seen mostly a technical bureaucratic activity - not embedded in the day-to-day routines and practices of the universities or study programs. This shows that many higher education institutions do not demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes.

The **weak points** identified at the **agency** are summarized as follows.

- Lack of uniform distribution of the attributions at technical staff level: differences in the work-load of some compartments within the ARACIS organizational chart;
- The Methodology and Guide need to be revised and improved: the action in in progress;
- The activity of evaluators was not always as satisfactory as expected;
- Internal procedures not yet fully finalised and applied;
- Smaller number of evaluators in some study domains in the National Register of Evaluators;
- Insufficient space to conduct some activities, especially parrallel meetings;
- Insufficient space for the archive.

Opportunities

- International opening through collaborations and exchanges of experiences with other agencies of quality assurance in higher education, as well as potential involvement in other international projects;
- Opening to the labor market through collaborations with professional organizations;
- Ability to develop European funded projects;
- Alignment to the requirements of the international accounting and to the accounting of European funds public institutions – for Accountability Department;
- Opportunity to exchange good practice with and to support other quality assurance agencies.

Threats

- Legislative changes;
- Quality assurance „fatigue” in universities;
- Attempts of local authorities/politicians to support the local HE institutions with their „influence”;
- Insufficient funding of HE.

4.3. Priorities for improvement

Improving the quality level of ARACIS activities remains a major goal, although a great deal has been achieved already.

Specification of quality standards is to be further developed, as the Law formulates the domains and criteria of concerns for QA. ARACIS and HEIs consider the standards and performance indicators (PI) as: (a) representing reference points for institutional quality management; (b) offering a framework for collecting information, maintaining databases and processing information which HEIs can use for internal monitoring and external demonstration of QA; (c) providing ARACIS with references in the process of external evaluation as Standards and PI should be closely related in each HEI with the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (RNCIS).

In the future, a more balanced set of performance indicators is needed, focusing mostly on processes of quality assurance (internal management of quality at all levels, study programs, faculties, institution) and outputs (learning outcomes, scientific production), related to inputs as conditionalities (staffing, teaching/learning environment).

Setting new QA evaluation principles is a longer term goal of the agency, to be implemented in accordance with a confidence-building process in Romanian Higher education.

This will demand a **shift of focus** in the activity and in its perception in the eyes of all participants and stakeholders: from quality control or monitoring (as external evaluation is still perceived, mostly by the public and even by some authorities and the mass-media) to *quality enhancement*.

Therefore, a more balanced relationship shall be developed between *Compulsory normative minimal requirements* (useful mostly for accreditation) and an enhanced *fitness-for-purpose* approach (for periodical evaluation) with focus on a “*benchmarking*” approach”. The benchmarking approach is seen as meeting of threshold indicators’ level – as a result of institutional and inter-institutional comparisons.

Benchmarking will be a dynamic process based on the current performance of Romanian universities, in correlation with European trends and benchmarks. With benchmarking regarded as a quality enhancement tool, universities and study programs will be encouraged to gather systematic data and to set internal reference points – intra-institutional or intra-programme comparisons. Universities will be encouraged to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses and to take remedial decisions on the basis of evidence.

Periodical (cyclical) evaluation will be in the longer run mostly focused on the audit of the internal quality system (process) and quality enhancement. The institutions will be thus encouraged to assume full responsibility for assuring quality and also to involve stakeholders so as to assure the validity of their study programmes. We hope the conditions for the direct application of this project will be there after a second round of external evaluations of HE institutions will be completed.

The performance indicators will take into account more and more parameters such as “learning outcomes”, although the agency is aware of the danger of reducing quality assurance to evaluations based simply on output/outcome data.

In conclusion we believe that our vision for quality of higher education is to focus on *building better systems to give all stakeholders what they expect in terms of quality of education, to stimulate research and to reduce brain drain*.

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)

Self Evaluation Report 2013

ANEXE



Sediul ARACIS

Law amending Emergency Government Ordinance no. 75/2005 on providing quality education

The Senate adopt this bill (draft law)

Single article. - Emergency Government Ordinance no. 75/2005 on providing quality education, published in Romanian Official Monitor, Part I, no. 642 from 20th of July 2005, approved with modifications with Law no. 87.2006, subsequently amended, is modified as follows:

1. **Article 16, paragraph (2) will be read as follows:**
“(2) Headquarters, structure and operational rules of ARACIS are established by decision of ARACIS Council, within 60 days”.
2. **Article 19, paragraph (1) will be read as follows:**
ARACIS is run by a board composed of 17 members, with teaching positions in higher education system, and two students, representatives of the students Federations of Romania.

This bill (draft law) was adopted by the Senate in its meeting of April 26, 2011, in compliance with article 76 paragraph (1) from the Romanian Constitution, republished.

The president of the Senate,

Mircea Geoană



Annex 2

Date: 11.05.2011

Achim Hopbach
President of ENQA
c/o ENQA Secretariat
Porkkalankatu 7A
00810 Helsinki, Finland

Dear dr. Hopbach,

Re-confirmation of ARACIS Full Membership of ENQA – progress report

Bruno Curvale's letter to Radu Damian of 10 June 2009 informed us of the decision of the Board of ENQA to grant ARACIS Full membership of ENQA for five years from 2 June 2009. In addition, the Board found that there were some areas of development included in Annex 1 to Bruno Curvale's letter and required ARACIS to submit a progress report on these areas no later than June 2011.

The purpose of this report is to show the actions that ARACIS has taken to address the questions mentioned in the abovementioned Annex 1. Some of these action lines were included in the letter signed by ARACIS President Ioan Curtu and mailed to Emmi Helle on 16 July 2009 (see also Annex 1).

The most important activity ARACIS has undertaken is to **improve internal quality assurance procedures**. To this end, several action lines were proposed by the ARACIS executive bureau and approved by the Council.

- *Administrative procedures.* The agency has developed an Internal Quality Assurance Manual of Procedures which covers all the administrative aspects of the current activities (see annex 2 – an outline; the full working document is in Romanian). The internal QA system is now clearly described. The full implementation is now in progress in a step-by-step procedure since it has to be correlated to the evolution of some external factors: a) The new Methodology of evaluation, which is now being developed as part of the Project *Asigurarea calității în învățământul superior din România în context European. Dezvoltarea managementului calității academice la nivel de sistem și instituțional – ACADEMIS (Quality Assurance in the European Context. Development of Quality Management at System and Institutional Level)* funded from EU structural funds. The project deadline is in October 2011. The Methodology will include the requirements of the new Law of national education No.1/2011 which refer to ARACIS. In that sense, the agency will become also responsible for evaluating quality assurance for Master domains (in addition to the Master study programs) as well as for doctoral study programs, and in the future will become involved in the classification of universities. The new law of education also opens the possibility for



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THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Membră cu drepturi depline în Asociația Europeană pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior - ENQA
Înscrișă în Registrul European pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior - EQAF

Strada Spiru Haret nr. 12, sector 1, București, România

other agencies listed in the EQAR to perform evaluations in Romania and specifies a number of additional activities for ARACIS with respect to the Law 87/2006 which remains in force as the specific legislation for ARACIS. b) At the moment we are completing this progress report, one important modification of the Law 87/2006 and of the Government Decision 1257/2005 which are the legal background for the functioning of ARACIS, has been approved by the Romanian Parliament. The modification empowers ARACIS to better match its number of permanent staff positions (at the moment max. 35 full staff) to its evolving working demand and to include students as full members of the Council (until now they had observer status). In the same time, the agency is now able to start the procedures for ownership of new more adequate premises. (annex 3)

- *Quality of the external evaluations.* To improve quality, for the external evaluators listed in the Register of external evaluators of ARACIS a first *Manual for evaluating quality of university study programs (Manualul evaluatorului calitatii programelor de studii universitare)* authored by M. Alamoreanu, I. Petrescu and F. Moraru, from ARACIS Commission of permanent specialty experts was published Romanian by ARACIS in 2009 (see <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publicatii/publicatii-aracis/>). The external evaluators followed several training sessions supported by the agency from its own resources and from the abovementioned project *Asigurarea calității în învățământul superior din România în context European. Dezvoltarea managementului calității academice la nivel de sistem și instituțional – ACADEMIS (Quality Assurance in the European Context. Development of Quality Management at System and Institutional Level)* the agency is running since 2009 (see the list of training sessions in annex 4).

The *Course support for the training sessions of evaluators (Suport de curs pentru formarea evaluatorilor, vol. I and vol. 2, 687 p., ISBN 978-606-8154-05-3, 2010, ed. QualMedia, Bucharest, Co-ordinated by M. Ivanescu, D. Stanciu and M. Florescu from ARACIS, authored by 32 ARACIS evaluators and members of permanent Standing committees)* was made available in Romanian to the participants in printed form and on the website (see <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publicatii/publicatii-aracis/>).

In addition, an electronic facility has been developed and implemented which allows the agency to test the level of understanding of the QA procedures of the agency of all the external evaluators, local and from abroad, who expresses the wish to take part in evaluation of study programs and higher education institutions. Following this testing, which took place in electronic form, in three (one month each) sessions, the number of evaluators in the register is now 1460 (see <http://pfe.aracis.ro/cms/>).

The composition of the Standing committees has been revised after an analysis of the quality of their work and interaction with the universities.

- *Quality of permanent staff.* The quality of the activity of permanent staff has been monitored by several procedures which are stipulated in the Romanian legislation. As a result of this process, which is performed on a yearly basis, but also when there are special requirements, one staff member had to leave the agency in April 2011 since the level of performance was considered un-satisfactory at all three evaluations. The proficiency in English of the staff is also under attention, the English classes for staff are continuing on a permanent basis and are supported by the agency. Several permanent staff participated in study visits organized by the agency to our ENQA partner agencies, in which other stakeholders were invited to take part in order to help



with the understanding of other European experience in quality assurance in higher education and application of the ESGs. (see in annex 5 the list of agencies visited by ARACIS delegations under the frame of the project ACADEMIS)

- *Quality of student evaluators.* The agency has continued on a permanent basis the training of student evaluators in co-operation with the two student confederations representative at national level which are active in quality assurance. Students representatives participated in the study visits to agencies from France, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Spain.
- *The appeal procedures.* The appeals procedures have been more clearly described, as it can be found in the *Part III – Academic quality external evaluation of accredited higher education institution*, published on the website of the agency (see English translation in annex 6)
- *The reconstruction of the website of the Agency has become effective*, contributing to improved visibility of the activity of ARACIS. The new English version includes also the procedures for international evaluators to become listed in the Register of external evaluators as well as information on organization, procedures, results of evaluation, legislative framework, international activities, publication, projects.

Development of **system-wide analyses** started in 2009 but the results were not fully available in June 2009 when the letter from the ENQA Board to ARACIS was signed by Bruno Curvale. The first “Quality Assurance Barometer – the Status of Quality in Romanian higher education” was made public in November 2009 (see <http://proiecte.aracis.ro/academis/asigurarea-calitatii-invatamantului-universitar/rezultate/>; the full text is available in print and on CD), the second “Barometer” in January 2011 and the yearly reports of the agency include reference to the results of institutional and study program evaluation at system level. The results are made public through publications, participation to quality assurance Forums and conferences as well as in regional Conferences organized to this end in different academic centers. In 2011 there will be seven such events, organized for all 110 universities, out of which three already took place in Constanta, Iași and Craiova (see annex 7) The results are discussed in view of suggestions from the participants for improving the methodology and for better internal QA procedures within universities to build-up a real quality culture.

ARACIS has already developed a database, which is presently in a pilot phase, including information from 46 universities already evaluated in the ACADEMIS Project and ARACIS hopes to extend next year the data base with data from all accredited HEIs. Data specifications are the following:

Input indicators, which estimate the institution resources: Human resources; Logistics; Financial resources. **Process indicators**, which estimate educational, research and administrative processes (i.e. educational technologies, academic counseling services etc.). **Output indicators**, which estimate the results of the educational, research and administrative processes (i.e. the number of degrees issued, the number of invention patents or papers published in academic journals etc.). **Outcome indicators**, which estimate the impact of the activity of the higher education institutions (i.e. effects on the labor market, increased productivity in a specific economic sector etc.).

The database is up-dated on a permanent basis and has already become an important tool for the agency.



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The insure **participation of stakeholders** in view to incorporate views from outside the community the agency took action and organized its own Standing committee of employers, including members representing different sectors of the economic and social activity, such as engineering, economists etc. The members of the Standing committee of the employers are already participating in evaluation of some Bachelor programmes and this activity will be extended to master and Doctoral programs in a time schedule coordinated with completion of the self-certification of the National Framework of Qualifications in higher education (see www.rncis.ro). The standards to be used for evaluations are already developed for some areas (see annex 8) and their development is in progress for other.

The other recommendations of the panel are also considered as of utmost importance for ARACIS and have been addressed. Some of those led to significant improved reporting procedures, follow-up mechanisms, accountability etc. Improved mechanisms to avoid potential conflicts of interests were put in place, the Code of Ethics was revised in accordance to ENQA panel of experts recommendations (see annex 9), being also instituted a new “no conflict of interest” (or “independence”) clause to be signed by evaluators.

I hope this progress- report and annexes cover in sufficient detail the way ARACIS has followed the specific questions asked by the Board. In the same time, we would be happy to provide further details of all other aspects the Board would like to know about our activity.

Your sincerely,

Prof. Ioan Curtu

President,
ARACIS

Prof. Ioan Curtu
President
Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)

Bonn, 26 September 2011

Subject: Progress report following the 2009 external review of ARACIS


Dear Professor Curtu,

I am writing to inform you of the outcome of the ENQA Board discussion of 30 June 2011 regarding the progress report based on recommendations for improvement arising from the external review of ARACIS in 2009.

The Board took note of the aforementioned report and expressed its satisfaction and appreciation with the improvements achieved.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to congratulate ARACIS about the progress it has made and measures it has taken as a consequence of the external review.

Kind regards,



Achim Hopbach
ENQA President

Decision No. 1731/2006

Of 06/12/2006

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 (ARACIS)

Published in the Official Gazette, Part I No. 988 of 11/12/2006

Based on art. 108 of the Romanian Constitution, republished, of Art. 21 Paragraph (2) let. b) and c) Government Emergency Ordinance No. 75/2005 on quality assurance in education, approved with amendments through Law No. 87/2006,

The Government of Romania hereby adopts this Decision.

Sole Article. – Are hereby approved 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, provided in the Annex that is part of this Decision.

PRIME-MINISTER
CĂLIN POPESCU-TĂRICEANU

Bucharest, 6 December 2006.
No. 1.731.

ANNEX

FEES
for higher education institutions' study programmes authorization and accreditation,
and for external evaluation of quality in education
of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

1. The fee for provisional study programmes authorization or accreditation in the Licence degree cycle, for all forms of higher education, is of 7 monthly raw salaries for a university professor in the State higher education with maximum years of service, at the minimum level set by the law.
2. The fee for evaluation of study programmes specific to master and doctor degree cycles is the following :
 - in fields with only one study programme specific to master and doctor degree cycles, the fee is 1 monthly raw salary for a university professor in the State higher education with maximum years of service, at the minimum level set by the law;
 - in fields with several study programmes, the fee is 1 monthly raw salary for a university professor in the State higher education with maximum years of service, at the minimum level set by the law, to which is added a 0.50 coefficient for each study programme specific to the additional master and doctor degree cycles of the same file ;
3. The fee for periodical evaluation, every 5 years, of an accredited Licence degree cycle, is 6 monthly raw salaries for a university professor in the State higher education with maximum years of service, at the minimum level set by the law.
4. The fee for institutional accreditation or for external evaluation of the quality of a higher education institution is the following:
 - for universities up to 9,000 students, the fee is 17 monthly raw salaries for a university professor in the State higher education with maximum years of service, at the minimum level set by the law;
 - for universities enrolling 9,001-20,000 students, the fee is 36 monthly raw salaries for a university professor in the State higher education with maximum years of service, at the minimum level set by the law;

- for universities exceeding 20,000 students, the fee is 48 monthly raw salaries for a university professor in the State higher education with maximum years of service, at the minimum level set by the law.

Emergency Ordinance No. 102/2006

Of 13/12/2006

Amending the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 75/2005 on quality assurance in education

Given the fact that prior to the accession of Romania to the European Union, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) has to prepare the legislative framework and the documentation to record it in the European Register of Agencies for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, provided it does not receive subsidies from the State budget,

Given the urgent need to change the experimental application deadlines in the normative acts specific to quality assurance in education' activities from university year 2005-2006 to university year 2006-2007, and in order to avoid a major blockage that might occur in the internal and international activity of ARACIS,

Based on Art.115 paragraph (4) of the Romanian Constitution, republished,

The Government of Romania hereby adopts this Emergency Ordinance.

Sole Article. – the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 75/2005 on quality assurance in education, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, No. 642 of July 20, 2005, approved with amendments through Law No. 87/2006, is amended as follows:

1. Paragraph (1) of Article 21 shall have the following contents:

"(1) ARACIS is fully financed out of its own incomes."

2. Article 36 shall have the following contents:

"Art. 36. - (1) The education provider organizations shall experiment internal quality evaluation mechanisms, stipulated by this Emergency Ordinance, starting with the second semester of the school year 2005-2006, and university year 2006-2007.

(2) During the school year 2005-2006, and university year 2006-2007, ARACIP and ARACIS shall experiment the quality evaluation and external assurance methodologies. Prior to September 1st, 2006 and September 1st, 2007, ARACIP and ARACIS shall issue a detailed report on the experiment results.

(3) Starting with the school year 2006-2007, and university year 2007-2008, the methodologies of internal and external evaluation for quality assurance shall be applied, in accordance with the provisions of this Emergency Ordinance, at the national level, while keeping into account the results of the experiment stage."

PRIME-MINISTER
CĂLIN POPESCU-TĂRICEANU

Annex

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

**METHODOLOGY FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATION,
STANDARDS, STANDARDS OF REFERENCE, AND LIST OF
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OF THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR
QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Bucharest

2006

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Preamble

The Methodology for quality assurance, provisional authorisation to operate and accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions, being hereinafter referred to as “The Methodology”, concretizes the provisions of the Government’s Emergency Ordinance (GEO) no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, as approved with modifications through Law no. 87/2006, with further modifications.

The Methodology applies, beginning with academic year 2006-2007, to:

- a) the provisional authorisation to operate of new Licence Degree¹ study programmes initiated and proposed by accredited higher education institutions;
- b) the provisional authorisation to operate for higher education providers which plan to initiate Licence Degree study programmes and of previously initiated Licence Degree study programmes;
- c) the accreditation of Master’s Degree awarding institutions (MDAI) and Doctoral Degree awarding institutions (DDAI) based on self-evaluation and external evaluation of a given field of specialization and of each Master or Doctorate within, proposed to start functioning in the academic year 2006-2007. The Master and Doctoral study programmes already existing in 2006-2007 will continue to operate until they are completed and will gradually be replaced by accredited ones.
- d) those study programmes and higher education institutions which have already been accredited based on the implementation of the provisions of the republished *Law no. 88/1993 on the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Recognition of Diplomas*,

Alongside these activities of authorisation and accreditation, in order to improve the quality and consolidate the relationships and the cooperation between RAQAHE and higher education institutions, the **Methodology** will be trialled in the academic year 2006-2007 in all accredited universities which volunteer to participate in the pilot initiative. The results of

¹ Licence Degree (in Romanian “Licenta”) corresponds to Bachelor’s Degree

the application of the **Methodology** in the academic year 2006-2007 will be synthesized in a RAQAHE report on the status of quality in higher education.

The Methodology is intended for:

- a) representatives of Romanian universities – rectors and vice-rectors, deans and vice-deans, heads of chairs and departments, members of academic communities composed of students, academics, scientific researchers and administrative staff - namely all those whose activities shape and develop the academic quality in universities and faculties;
- b) commissions and other structures directly responsible for quality management in universities or with the external evaluation of quality;
- c) higher education stakeholders, namely students, employers and, in a broader sense, society as a whole.

The Methodology uses the terminology and the concepts established through the **GEO no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education** and will be further developed by RAQAHE, in compliance with the legal provisions, in order to consolidate its practical character and better serve the stakeholders in connection with the activities carried out in universities and their concrete requirements. In this respect, RAQAHE closely cooperates with all interested universities, the Ministry of Education and Research as well as with representatives of students, trade unions, and corporations. The transparency of information and decisions will be ensured so that the public can follow the development of the system of quality assurance in Romanian higher education as part of the European Higher Education Area.

Part I: Principles of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The changes that have taken place in Romanian higher education, as well as all over Europe and in other parts of the world, have been equally numerous, radical and continuous. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Romania has seen the creation of a number of private universities and an increase in the number of public universities, faculties or new study programmes and their respective specializations. As a consequence of these diversifications and multiplications, **Law no. 88/1993 on Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Recognition of Diplomas** was adopted. Based on this Law, the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (NCAEA) was created. Between 1993 and 2006, NCAEA was responsible for the evaluation and accreditation of institutions and study programmes.

Since the beginning of the implementation of Law no. 88/1993 up to the present, the national higher education system has also undergone other significant transformations, and following the signing of the Bologna Declaration, in 1999, Romania became a member of the Bologna Process which aims to create the European Higher Education Area by 2010, through a series of change and transformation initiatives.

1.1. Transformations in higher education

The Methodology takes into consideration, to differing degrees, the following aspects of the transformations which have already been made or are still in progress:

- The diversity of higher education institutions, which mainly results from:
 - changes of the traditional university profile, especially through the diversification of study programmes;
 - the co-existence of comprehensive, pluri-disciplinary universities and those concentrated in a narrower disciplinary field;
 - the existence of certain organizations which are running study programmes offered, in different forms, by foreign transnational or borderless universities;

- The multiplication of programme formulas which ensure a “distributed learning”, based more on study programmes and teaching staff mobility and less or not at all on student mobility, in the following forms:
 - establishment of territorial branches;
 - distance learning programmes, part time programmes or other study forms approved by Law.
- The growth of higher education institutions’ complexity and size, in terms of number of study programmes and students, accompanied by certain difficulties, such as:
 - the transformation of elitist universities into mass higher education institutions;
 - the maintenance and even strengthening of research performance requirements, as well as teaching requirements;
 - problems in recruiting young researchers and teaching staff because of uncompetitive salaries;
 - profound disparities, in terms of attractivity, between different study programmes and, implicitly, between sources and levels of financing from public and extra-budgetary funds.
- The disparity between institutional requirements, particularly at public institutions, with regard to successful academic management and certain inadequate management practices, has different sources:
 - the harmonization of central management with the management of faculties or departments has resulted in certain difficulties in allocating resources and fulfilling objectives, which has had a negative influence on an institutional quality framework;
 - the lack of institutional homogeneity has consequences for institutional quality profile.
- The promotion of good practice in academic performance in Romanian and foreign universities;

- The participation in the European Higher Education Area and the globalization effects are increasing the pressure of competitive forces on a growing higher education market.

1.2 Fundamental principles of addressing the quality of higher education

Since such changes and characteristics have a relevant influence on quality assurance in higher education, the connection between the dynamics of the higher education system and/or institutions and the way of addressing quality is essential.

According to the legislation in force, the achievement and evaluation of quality have both an external and internal dimension.

The External dimension was instituted by the Bologna Process which is based on a programmatic document (the “Bologna Declaration”, 1999) adopted by all Ministers responsible for higher education in the member countries and the Communiqués signed by the Ministers of Education at the meetings held in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), and Bergen (2005). The rigorous implementation of the set of provisions established at a European level is required for the registration of national agencies for quality assurance, including RAQAHE, in the European Register set up by the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). At the same time, the positioning of Romania in the European Higher Education Area will lead to a confidence of quality and as well as to a higher level of recognition of the Romanian academic and/or professional diplomas.

The internal dimension of academic quality builds upon the legislation in force, the specificity of each higher education institution, and the tradition and cultural patrimony of our higher education system. It falls entirely under the responsibility of each higher education institution or provider of higher education programmes. From this perspective, quality assurance becomes a process adapted to the existing institutional specificity and a mechanism for permanently improving academic performance or results. For this reason, the principles of reference of the **Methodology** are specified hereunder:

- *European dimension:* the Romanian higher education system and its institutions belong to the European Higher Education Area and ensure quality levels

corresponding to the requirements of this space and remain competitive at European and international levels.

- ***Institutional responsibility:*** the quality assurance management and responsibility fall under the competence of each accredited higher education institution, in conformity with academic autonomy.
- ***Institutional diversity:*** the diversity of the institutions, of their missions and objectives is respected and encouraged by means of the external evaluation of quality.
- ***Cooperation with all components of the educational system:*** the approach, the implemented practices and the forms of technical assistance offered by RAQAHE are based on cooperation and mutual trust in its relationships with higher education institutions and other partners.
- ***Focus on results:*** the results of learning and university research performance – seen as a component of the education process – hold the central reference position in quality assurance and evaluation
- ***Institutional identity:*** learning and research results and performance can be achieved through a variety of practices, methods or structures, autonomously designed and implemented by each institution, according to its own options. In this respect, the most important weight, in the evaluations made by RAQAHE, is given to results and performance, without neglecting the influence of good practices and successful structures in the field of academic quality.
- ***Internal institutional self-evaluation of quality:*** each self-evaluation document must present the specificity of the quality culture in the higher education institution and ensure continuous performance improvement;

- **External evaluation:** external evaluation is based on the higher education institution proving its learning and research results and performance and the verification of their relationship with stated institutional reality, including the verification of student activity, against the stated standards.
- **Improvement of quality:** the permanent improvement of quality and its institutional management represents the main objective of the external evaluation.

These principles constitute the reference framework for RAQAHE activity and this **Methodology**. Their aim is to promote that quality culture which will consistently contribute to achieving a quality higher education, defined as a public good, worthy of public trust, and contributing to a student's personal development and achievement, as well as to the continuous improvement of the quality of life, culture and national economy within a European framework. The principles are formulated so as to ensure not only the continuity of the activities and results of the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (NCAEA) for the period 1993-2006, but also the development of a quality education in the new European and international contexts.

1.3. Relationships between RAQAHE and other institutions

The new way of addressing quality assurance in higher education is based on the autonomy of the universities in formulating and achieving their own options with regard the quality level and its implementation management. At the same time, RAQAHE and the higher education institutions together with other authorities responsible for organizing and carrying out the educational process are actively cooperating to:

- permanently improve quality through:
 - evaluating, revising and improving the quality criteria, standards and performance indicators, while correlating them with the qualification requirements provided by the National Qualification Framework

- raising the level of the standards of reference and corresponding performance indicators in each institution, according to its mission;
- assuming, as completely as possible, the capacity of public accountability by:
 - achieving quality levels which correspond to the stakeholders' expectations, especially those of students and employers;
 - affirming higher education as a public good;
 - ensuring a clear, consistent and coherent communication with the stakeholders;
 - correctly informing the public with regard to achieved results and intended improvements.
- promoting methods for encouraging self-evaluation and, where necessary, planning change and improvement strategies, by:
 - honestly and rigorously identifying achievements and deficiencies;
 - promoting achievements and rapidly correcting deficiencies;
 - taking results as a reference for evaluation.

1.4 Quality assurance and accreditation

The main objective of RAQAHE activities is to assure and improve quality. Accreditation is that process of assuring and improving academic quality through which an education provider is first provisionally authorized to operate as a higher education institution and organize admission sessions, and is then accredited and recognised as a part of the national higher education system, with the right to deliver diplomas, certificates and other documents recognized at national level, to organize graduation, Licence, Master and Doctoral examinations. **The standards, standards of reference and performance indicators for both assuring quality in already accredited institutions and accrediting newly established institutions are the same.** The difference is determined by their level of achievement. In granting the authorisation and accreditation of an institution, the minimum level of performance indicator achievement is taken into consideration. In terms of quality assurance, the standards of reference may be set at optimal institutional levels, exceeding the minimum requirement level. **Through accreditation, RAQAHE aims:**

- to assure the academic community, the stakeholders and the public at large that the accredited institution satisfies the minimum quality standards of a higher education institution;
- to promote the engagement of the institution in the continual development of academic quality proved by learning and research outcomes;
- to consecrate institutional standards for a quality management and a quality culture and demonstrate their status through relevant evidence and documents;
- to support and encourage the institution to evaluate itself and cooperate in its external evaluation in order to assure and develop quality;
- to cooperate with other higher education institutions and the National Authority for Higher Education Qualifications in achieving, monitoring and comparing academic quality;
- not to accept study programmes offered by education providers which do not satisfy the minimum standards of academic quality.

1.5 Quality assurance areas

Three fundamental **areas** of quality assurance in education must be taken into consideration for the organization and functioning of an organization which aims to become or already operates as a higher education institution. The criteria, the standards and the performance indicators are formulated so as to stress not only the institution's compliance with a predetermined or predefined set of quantitative and qualitative conditions, but also the deliberate, voluntary and proactive engagement of the institution in achieving certain performances, which can be demonstrated through effective outcomes. The role of the

external evaluator, namely RAQAHE, is to acknowledge and evaluate the managerial and educational capacity of the education provider, in order to be able, on this basis, to state, then validate or invalidate its functioning publicly and with documentary evidence.

1. ***Institutional Capacity***: the institution is coherently organized, has an adequate management and administration and the material basis and financial resources necessary for a stable functioning, in the short and medium term, as well as the necessary human resources for achieving its stated mission and objectives.
2. ***Educational effectiveness*** refers to the organization of teaching, learning and research processes in terms of content, methods and techniques, resources, selection of students and teaching and research staff, which would enable the institution to achieve the learning and research outcomes stated through its mission, which must be clearly formulated. The evaluation criteria for educational effectiveness refer to:
 - a) the design of objectives and outcomes, which should be:
 - clearly formulated and easy to understand;
 - adequate for the aimed academic qualifications (Licence or specialization in a certain field, Master's or Doctorate) and differentiated by discipline and/or study programme;
 - b) the organization of the learning framework, through:
 - plans, study programmes, teaching methods, student evaluation criteria and techniques;
 - the adequate recruitment and development of academic staff;
 - the resources and learning facilities made available, related to the financial activity of the organization;
 - organization of the teaching, learning and student examination flows;
 - student support services, including extracurricular activities.
3. ***Quality Management*** concentrates on those strategies, structures, techniques and operations through which the institution demonstrates that it evaluates its own performance related to education quality assurance and improvement, and has

information systems in place which demonstrate its learning and research outcomes. The importance of this area consists, both on the emphasis put on the quality assurance approach of the institution towards all its activities, and on the presentation of information and data to the public, proving a certain quality level.

The three areas are complementary, and, according to the legal provisions, their use is compulsory. Therefore, any higher education institution is encouraged to reach the stage at which it has the means and can provide the information in these three areas, taking into consideration its specific profile, mission and objectives. The Head of the higher education institution, through a Commission for evaluation and quality assurance at the institution, is responsible for the elaboration and implementation of the quality strategies, structured around the three areas.

1.6 Terminology

In this section, the meanings associated with the main terms used in the implementation of this **Methodology** are specified.

Higher education providing organization is an education institution or other legal person, which, according to its statute, carries out higher education activities based on legally approved study programmes. According to the Law, an education providing organization submits itself to the evaluation procedure, for the external evaluation of quality or, as the case may be, for obtaining the provisional authorisation to operate or the accreditation of the study programmes and/or its own accreditation as an education providing organization. Only the provisionally authorised or accredited higher education institutions may carry out higher education activities and use the name “university” or other similar names (Art. 29, par. (4), letter a) and b) and Art. 35, par. (1) from GEO 75/2005); the accreditation of higher education institutions is made by Law, promoted by the Government, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research, based on RAQAHE approval (Art.31, letter g) from GEO 75/2005).

Study programme: a study/specialization programme consists of all the activities (design, organization, management, and the process of teaching, learning and research)

carried out in a certain field, which lead to an academic qualification. Study programmes are differentiated by: (a) the level of academic qualification: Licence, Master, Doctorate; (b) the mode of study: full-time, evening, part-time, distance learning etc. (c) the field of knowledge specialization, in accordance with the division of academic knowledge and the professional division of labour. A study programme is achieved through: (a) a *curriculum*, which includes all disciplines that lead to an academic qualification, distributed by year of study, their weight being expressed in European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) type of study credits; (b) course programmes or *syllabuses* in which are formulated: the teaching and learning themes and practices associated with teaching, learning and evaluation; (c) *the organization chart of students and teaching staff* for the study programme implementation period; (d) the system of academic *quality assurance* for all activities required for carrying out the study programme.

Provisional authorisation to operate for study programmes and/or institutions is the first stage of the accreditation procedure and represents the result of an external evaluation made by RAQAHE, based on a self-evaluation report submitted by the applicant. The provisional authorisation to operate is the document which confers the higher education institution or the education providing organization the right to carry out educational activities and organize, if necessary, entrance examinations for a study programme. The provisional authorisation to operate for a study programme is granted, based on the approval of RAQAHE and of the Ministry of Education and Research, through a Government Decision initiated by the Ministry of Education and Research, within 90 calendar days from communication of the approval. The provisional authorisation to operate for an institution may be granted, by Government Decision, a minimum of 6 months before the beginning of a new academic year, if the education providing organization initiated at least three study programmes which have been proposed and provisionally authorized to operate by the Ministry of Education and Research.

Accreditation is the quality assurance modality by which the standards for an education providing organization and study programme functioning are certified. Accreditation is proposed and granted, based on the results of an external evaluation process

carried out by RAQAHE, in recognition of the academic quality of a higher education institution or other education providing organization, which is provisionally authorized to operate and complies with the minimum standard requirements and performance indicators concerning the quality of education. The accreditation of a study programme is made by Government Decision initiated by the Ministry of Education and Research, based on RAQAHE approval, within 90 calendar days from the communication of the approval. The accreditation of a higher education institution, regardless of its status (university, academy of study, institute, school or higher education providing organization), is made by Law, issued by the Government, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research, based on RAQAHE approval. A draft Law concerning the accreditation of a higher education institution may be initiated by the Ministry of Education and Research only if the institution has at least three accredited study programmes. Accredited higher education institutions are integrated into the national higher education system and have the right to deliver diplomas, certificates and other study documents recognized by the Ministry of Education and Research, and to organize graduation examinations, leading to the awards of Licence, Master's and/or Doctorate degrees.

Standards, Standards of Reference, and Performance Indicators describe the quality requirements for the activities of an education providing organization which applies for a provisional authorisation to operate, an accredited higher education institution which applies for a provisional authorisation to operate or accreditation of a new study programme, or an accredited higher education institution which applies for an external evaluation of the education it offers. The standards address, on a differentiated basis, the areas and criteria of quality assurance in education, and the performance indicators measure the degree of accomplishment of a certain activity against the concerned standards.

Standards are formulated in terms of rules and outcomes and define the minimum compulsory level of achievement of an activity. All standards are formulated in general terms, in a statement form, and are expressed in sets of performance indicators. Standards are differentiated by areas and criteria.

The Standards of Reference are those standards which define the optimal level of achievement of an activity by an education providing organization, based on existing national, European or international good practice. The Standards of Reference are specific to each study programme or institution, they are optional, and are set above the minimal level. The Standards of Reference can vary from one institution to another, and it is possible that, over time, institutions formulate their own Standards of Reference at higher and more competitive national and international levels. The level of a Standard of Reference is made by comparison with a Standard, and, within the latter, by comparison with the optional levels of the performance indicators.

A Performance Indicator represents an instrument for measuring the level of accomplishment of a certain activity carried out by an education providing organization against a standard. The performance indicators identify those outcomes which vary from a *minimum acceptable level* to a *maximum identifiable level*. The minimum levels of performance indicators correspond to the requirements of a Standard. The maximum levels correspond to Standards of Reference, are optional, and differentiate the quality of an institution both hierarchically and progressively.

The provisional authorisation to operate and the accreditation of a study programme or institution are not only made comprehensively, but also based on the minimum level of all standards and performance indicators. The failure to meet of the minimum level of a performance indicator results in the postponement of the authorisation or accreditation. At the same time, the level of the standards of reference varies from one licence field to another and from one higher education institution to another. The formulation of Standards of Reference falls under the responsibility of the institution, based on the information offered by RAQAHE with regard to the European variation of standards and performance indicators. These must be understood as institution's own Standards of Reference, which the institution proposes and commits to in accordance with its own quality assurance strategy.

Periodic academic evaluation is made simultaneously for all higher education structures, which have been accredited or provisionally authorized to operate.

Branches of higher education institutions, faculties, and specializations, regardless of the form of study they offer (full time, part time, distance learning) or their geographical location, must observe the same quality standards. Such entities are considered distinct units

and must therefore submit to evaluation procedures separately.

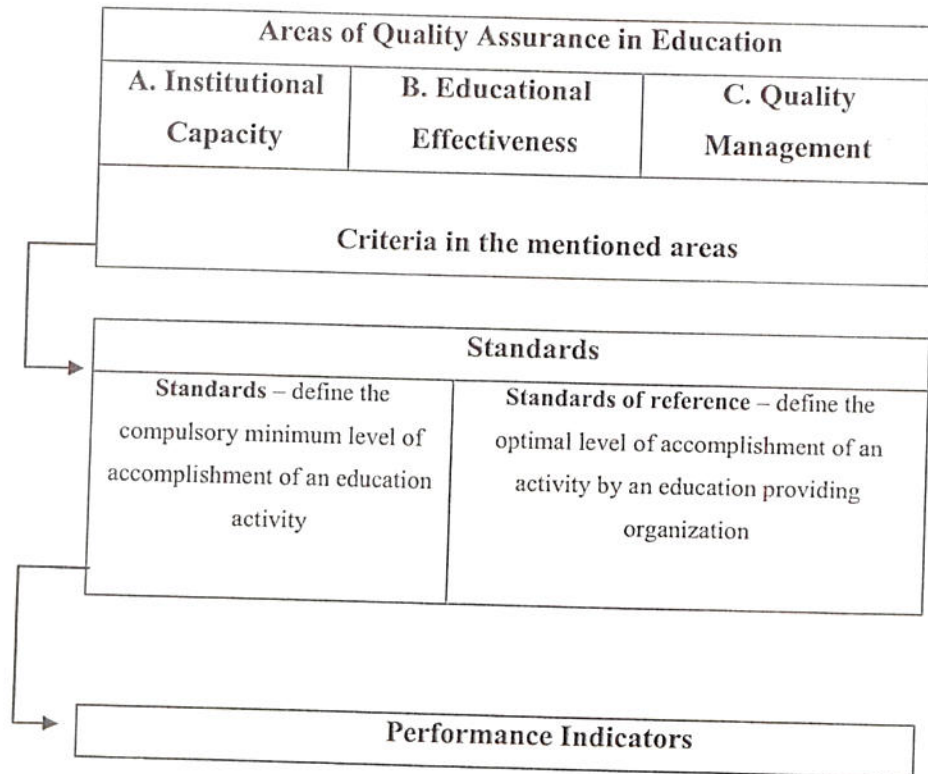
Part II. Criteria, Standards, and Performance Indicators for Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Criteria, standards, and performance indicators apply to quality assurance and accreditation. These are used by higher education institutions and by RAQAHE as follows: they (a) represent the reference point for quality management in higher education institutions; (b) offer the framework for collecting information and maintaining databases which institutions can use for internal monitoring and external demonstration of academic quality assurance; (c) are used by RAQAHE in the process of external evaluation and assurance of quality, for the purpose of accreditation and development of a quality culture.

2.1 Correlations and relationships between areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators

The set of correlations between the structure and the activities of an organization, which intends to become or already is a higher education institution, and the main requirements that correspond to standards, standards of reference and performance indicators is determined by the relationships between criteria, standards and performance indicators. The correlations and the hierarchical relationships between areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Hierarchical Relationships between Areas, Criteria, Standards and Indicators



Criteria address each of the three areas stipulated by Law and represent the fundamental aspects of the organization and functioning of an education providing organization. Each criterion is linked to a set of standards. The role of the standards is:

- to guide institutions in their self-evaluation of quality in order to independently assess their own results and performances, and to identify the areas in which they should correct or improve their performance;
- to provide a framework for the elaboration of institutional self-evaluation reports;
- to provide the basis for external evaluation;
- to establish a common framework of reference for quality assurance and accreditation.

Performance indicators vary from the minimum acceptable level, based on which is granted or maintained authorisation or accreditation status, to a certain level of reference that each institution adopts independently, based on comparing itself with similar institutions from Romania or abroad. The Standard is so defined that it corresponds, through its Performance Indicators, to the minimum acceptable level.

The levels of the Performance Indicators for Standards of Reference vary by institution. In addition to the **Methodology**, RAQAHE will provide information regarding the national, European and global variation of the Standards and levels of their Performance Indicators, in order to guide institutions in defining their own Standards of Reference. The **Methodology** specifies that the Standards and the minimum levels of the associated Performance Indicators are compulsory and comprehensive. The Standards of Reference and/or their levels in the **Methodology** are recommendations only. Institutions will elaborate and adopt their own Standards of Reference, taking also into consideration the information and consultancy offered by RAQAHE, on a contractual basis.

A set of Performance Indicators is associated to the Standard, in order for the latter to be implemented. An indicator identifies those outcomes which vary from a minimum acceptable level (Min) to a maximum identifiable level (Ref 1, Ref 2, etc.) The variation from minimum to maximum is specified, based on experiences in the field of many other institutions from Romania and from the European Higher Education Area. All higher education institutions will establish their own position, within the corresponding parameters of an indicator for a determined period (for instance the mandate cycle of the elected management, i.e. 4 years; the period of the institutional strategic plan; or another period). The minimum level of an indicator is the minimum required for granting the provisional authorisation to operate or the accreditation status. By establishing higher expectations for this indicator, higher education institutions can differentiate themselves from the point of view of quality.

The evaluation of quality in an institution is made within the three areas stipulated by Law, based on the information corresponding to standards and performance indicators.

2.2 Areas, Criteria, Standards, Performance Indicators

The Areas, Criteria, Standards, and Performance Indicators applied in quality assurance and accreditation are presented hereafter. Each of the three quality assurance areas are associated with a set of Standards, and to each Standard, the corresponding Performance Indicators. The requirements or levels of a Performance Indicator vary from a compulsory minimum level (Min) to a recommended level of reference (Ref.), for which the institution can opt or which can be raised according to the institution's own Standards of Reference.

Area A: Institutional Capacity

Criterion A.1 - Institutional, Administrative and Managerial Structures

The higher education institution formulates its mission and objectives in accordance with a set of values and target reference points to reflect its individual identity within the higher education system, and to affirm it as an autonomous institution which produces and disseminate knowledge in accordance with the values of academic freedom and ethical integrity. The higher education institution supports the activities aimed to accomplish the stated objectives through an adequate institutional, administrative and managerial structure.

Standards (S) and Performance Indicators (PI)

S.A.1.1 Mission, objectives and academic integrity

The higher education institution formulates its own mission and establishes the objectives to be achieved in accordance with a set of levels of reference. The institution proves that it respects and defends the staff and students' academic freedom and functions in terms of university autonomy and public responsibility and accountability for the education it offers and the resources it uses to meet these objectives.

Performance Indicators

PI.A.1.1.1. Mission and objectives

Min: The higher education institution is created and functions according to the Law. The institution has a University Charta, the provisions of which are in accordance with national legislation and the principles of

the European Higher Education Area, and are recognized by the members of the academic community. The stated mission and objectives reflect the individual identity of the institution within the national higher education system through clarity, distinction and specificity.

Ref 1: The manner in which the mission and objectives are formulated and accomplished reflect the individual identity of the institution within the European Higher Education Area.

PI.A.1.1.2. Academic integrity

Min: The institution has a code of ethics and academic integrity through which it defends the values of academic freedom, university autonomy and ethical integrity and has clear practices and mechanisms for implementing the code.

Ref.1: The institution not only has this kind of code and associated practices, but it is equally in control and able to provide evidence of their use in its management, research, teaching and learning processes. Such control mechanisms and results are made public.

PI.A.1.1.3. Responsibility and public accountability

Min: The institution has internal auditing practices concerning the main fields of academic activity in order to ensure that its stated commitments are rigorously observed while at the same time ensuring public transparency.

Ref. 1: Internal auditing is taking place effectively at institutional and departmental level, and on a periodic basis, observing internal regulations, financial and accounting procedures, academic integrity, teaching and learning methodology, examination, and research fields. An academic auditing report is discussed annually in the Senate and published, and an improvement plan is elaborated.

S.A.1.2 Management and administration

The institution has a coherent, integrated and transparent system of university management, based on an effective and efficient administration, adapted to the stated mission and objectives.

Performance Indicators

PI.A.1.2.1. The Management System

Min: The institution has a management system and internal operating regulations in conformity with current legal provisions. The mechanism for electing student representatives for Councils, Senate and other structures is clearly explained in the University Charta and in internal regulations. There is a democratic, transparent and non-discriminatory mechanism, which does not limit a student's right to represent and to be represented.

Ref. 1: The management system and the internal operating regulations use information and communication systems, such as the Internet and Intranet, which involve the members of the academic community, including students, and which meet public interests.

PI.A.1.2.2. Strategic Management

Min: The institution has a strategic plan for at least a four-year period together with annual operational plans, which are known to the members of the academic community and implemented in conformity with rigorous control practices and mechanisms

Ref.1: The strategic plan is elaborated for long, medium and short terms, is updated annually or when required by higher education evolution and context, and is consistently followed in its implementation and in the evaluation of the management's and administration's performance.

PI.A.1.2.3. Effective Administration

Min: The higher education institution has an administration which observes the legislation in force, is effective in terms of organization, staffing

levels and qualifications, and functions rigorously in the services offered to the academic community.

Ref.1: The higher education institution has an effective and rigorous administration as well as the necessary mechanisms of control and continuing development of the administration's performance.

Ref.2: The level of informatization of the administration is compatible with that of the European area.

Criterion A.2 –Material Resources

S.A.2.1. Property, equipment, and allocated financial resources

The higher education institution has its own property which effectively supports the implementation of its stated mission and objectives.

Performance indicators

PI.A.2.1.1. Facilities for teaching, research and other activities

Min: Whilst observing the differences between study forms (full-time, evening courses, part-time and distance learning) as well as the objectives of research activities, the higher education institution ensures adequate teaching and research facilities which correspond to its mission (teaching rooms, laboratories and research centres in conformity with current technical, safety, and sanitary norms). The quality of these facilities is evaluated by area, volume, technical condition, maximum number of students, number of teaching and research staff (differentiated by study field and study programmes) as well as institutionally, compared to national norms. The indicator also refers to the housing area and other facilities offered to students for social, cultural and sports activities.

Ref.1: In addition to the existing facilities, the higher education institution has realistic development and investment plans, within foreseen income levels.

PI.A.2.1.2. Equipment

Min: The teaching/seminar rooms are furnished with learning, teaching, and technical communication equipment which facilitate the teacher's

instruction and the student's understanding; research laboratories are provided with equipment and means corresponding to the minimum requirements.

Ref. 1: The equipment provided for teaching/seminar rooms and teaching and research laboratories corresponds to current norms in the development of scientific knowledge, and is comparable to that of developed European universities and to international good practices.

PI.A.2.1.3. Financial resources

Min: The institution can prove that it has sufficient financial resources in the short term (one year) and in the medium term (a minimum of three/four successive years), to adequately fulfil its stated mission and objectives. The institution has a realistic annual budget and a three/four-year budget, as well as financial policies for both the short and medium term which address its financial sustainability.

Ref. 1: In addition to the current requirements, the higher education institution has consistent financial provisions and diversified financing sources, necessary for the planning and defining of its investment policies and financial management.

PI.A.2.1.4. System of scholarships allocation and other forms of financial aid for students

Min: The institution has Regulations concerning the allocation of scholarships and other forms of financial aid for students, which it applies consistently. Scholarships are granted based on allocations coming from the state budget and from the institution's own resources.

Ref. 1: A minimum of 10% of the scholarship fund is provided by the institution's own resources.

Ref. 2: A minimum of 20% of the scholarship fund is provided by the institution's own resources

Area B: Education effectiveness

The higher education institution organises its teaching activities in terms of learning outcomes, and its research activities, by taking as a reference point its performance in developing and transferring knowledge and technology. This academic quality evaluation area addresses the teaching, learning, and research processes and their outcomes, in order to establish the level of education effectiveness.

Standards (S) and performance indicators (PI)

Criterion B.1 – Content of Study Programmes

S.B.1.1. Student admissions

The institution formulates its own student recruitment and admission policy and applies it transparently and rigorously, observing the principle of equal opportunities for all candidates, without discrimination.

PI.B.1.1.1. Principles of recruitment and admission's policy

Min: The institution is practicing a transparent policy for student recruitment and admission, which is publicly announced at least 6 months prior to implementation. University marketing promotes real and correct information, and indicates related means to verify and confirm the information. Admission is exclusively based on candidate's academic competences and does not use any discriminatory criteria.

PI.B.1.1.2. Admission practices

Min: The admission to an academic study cycle is only made upon previous diploma, taking into consideration the hierarchical order of merit at graduation.

Ref. 1: The admission to studies is based on a set of combined criteria in which the results of the entrance examination hold a greater weight.

S.B.1.2. Structure and formalisation of study programmes

Study programmes are thoroughly formulated, according to expected learning outcomes which correspond to an academic qualification.

Performance indicators

PI.B.1.2.1. Structure of study programmes

Min: Each study/specialization programme of the higher education institution is based on correlations between learning outcomes and research outcomes in the case of Master's and Doctoral programmes. A study programme is presented in the form of a series of documents which includes: general and specific objectives of the programme; the curriculum, with the subjects' weight expressed in ECTS study credits and disciplines distributed over the study period; thematic programmes and syllabuses expressing learning outcomes in the form of cognitive, technical or professional and affective-value competences achieved by a discipline; the examination and evaluation methods for each discipline, taking into consideration the planned learning outcomes; the method and content of the graduation examination as a comprehensive examination which certifies the assimilation of cognitive and professional competences corresponding to the academic qualification.

Ref. 1: Each study programme is presented according to the stated standard, but a study programme is implemented at the higher education institution level through cooperation between faculties and facilitating students' mobility within the higher education institution, through transfers and the accumulation of study credits. The number of ECTS credits is allocated to each discipline according to the "ECTS Users' Guide". The structure of the study programmes is flexible and allows each student to chose his/her own learning direction corresponding to his/her interests and skills. At least 30% of the total number of credits accumulated by a student at the end of a study programme comes from optional disciplines.

PI.B.1.2.2. Differentiation in the implementation of study programmes

Min: The study programmes have a unitary structure, regardless of the form of study (full-time, evening, part-time, distance learning) but their implementation is differentiated by the means used in the study form. For full time and distance learning forms, the indicator differentiates correspondingly.

Ref. 1: The implementation of the study programmes according to the form of study is monitored and substantiated through specialized internal structures (such as “Centre for Analysis and Pedagogical Development”) in which efficient and innovating pedagogic technologies are developed.

Ref. 2: The content of the study programmes is permanently updated by introducing new knowledge, resulting from scientific research, including their own research results

PI.B.1.2.3. Relevance of study programmes

Min: The cognitive and professional relevance of the study programmes are defined in relation to the development of knowledge and technology in the field and the labour market and qualification requirements. The institution has its own mechanism for annual peer review of the knowledge transmitted and assimilated by students and also for analyzing the changes produced in the qualification profiles and their impact on the organization of the study programme.

Ref. 1: The study programmes are revised periodically, based on peer reviews, together with students, graduates, and employer representatives.

Criterion B.2 – Learning outcomes

S.B.2.1 – Validation of academic qualifications

The knowledge, competences and skills acquired by graduates are sufficient for them to integrate into the labour market, to develop their own business, to access to the next study cycle and to continually learn and develop.

Performance indicators

PI.B.2.1.1 Validation by employability within the field of the academic qualification

Min: At least 50% of graduates are employed within two years of the graduation date at the level of their academic qualification.

Ref. 1: More than 70% of graduates are employed within two years of the graduation date at the level of their academic qualification.

PI.B.2.1.2. Validation by access to the next level of academic studies

Min: At least 20% of the last two series of Licence graduates are admitted to Master's programmes, regardless of the field of study*

Ref. 1: At least 50% of the last two series of graduates are admitted to master programmes, regardless of the field of study.**

*This percentage will grow, by field of study, including from the point of view of the financial support for the second cycle – Master's Degree - when *Law no. 288/2004 on the organization of the academic studies* is put into force.

**For the regulated professions in the fields of Medicine, Dental Medicine and Pharmacy there are special indicators, which take into consideration residential training period.

PI B.2.1.3 Level of students' satisfaction with regard to their professional and personal development ensured by the higher education institution

Min: More than 50% of students appreciate the learning/ personal development environment offered by the higher education institution and its compatibility with students' learning paths.

Ref.1: More than 70% of students appreciate the learning/ personal development environment offered by the higher education institution and its compatibility with students' learning paths.

PI B.2.1.4 Focus on student-centred learning methods

Min: The main responsibility of the teacher is to focus the learning methods and environments on the student, and to de-emphasize the traditional role of purely information transmitter. The student-teacher relationship is a partnership in which each assumes the responsibility of reaching the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are explained and discussed with students from the perspective of their relevance to the students' development. Teachers use new IT resources (e-mail, personal web page, topics, bibliographies and other resources in electronic format and communication with students) and auxiliary materials, such as whiteboard, flipchart and video-projector.

Ref. 1: Teachers are specially trained for teaching at university level and/or convene debate groups for discussing the teaching methodology. They not only have training/teaching competences, but also counselling, monitoring, and learning facilitation competences. A continuous process of identifying, developing, testing, implementing, and evaluating new effective learning techniques, including new IT and computer applications, takes place at the higher education institution. The study programmes are integrated with traineeships, placements and internships and student involvement in research projects. Teachers involve students in teaching (through questions asked in the classroom, short presentations, and demonstrative experiments) and the teaching process follows the students' learning pace. The teaching

strategy also takes into considerations the needs of students with disabilities.

Ref. 2: More than a simple transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, the institution creates learning environments and experiences which lead students to discover and create knowledge themselves. The teacher guides a student's intellectual development while giving it a strategic dimension.

PI B2.1.5 Student career guidance

Min: Teachers have tutorial hours available for students and personalize guidance at a student's request. There are counsellors or tutors by year of study and/or other forms of interaction between a teacher and a group of students.

Ref.1: At each faculty there is a structure for guiding students in choosing their courses and career. Peer tutorage between senior students and other students is in place. Teachers keep in touch with students via e-mail and through at least two counselling hours per week.

Criterion B.3 – Scientific Research Activities

S.B.3.1 Research Programmes

The institution has a long term strategy and medium and short term programmes which address the research objective, projects and expected outcomes, as well as the resources. There is a research ethos and culture, and mechanisms for the validating research outcomes.

Performance indicators

PI.B.3.1.1. Planning of research

Min: The long term strategy and medium and short term research programmes are adopted by the Senate and the Councils of faculties, which also specify the practices for obtaining and allocating resources and the means for validating the research outcomes .The research interests are predominantly institutional.

- Ref. 1: With regard to competitiveness and validation, research planning takes into consideration, and is made within, the national framework. Research is predominantly relevant at national level.
- Ref. 2: Research planning and achievement are made in relation to the European and global framework

PI B.3.1.2. Undertaking research

- Min: Sufficient financial, logistic and human resources are available for achieving the proposed research objectives.
- Ref. 1: There is an academic climate and culture strongly centred on research, evidenced by the number of research grants, publications, and the cognitive and technological transfer through consultancy, scientific parks etc. There are Doctoral schools for training young researchers.
- Ref. 2: There is evidence that scientific research corresponds to standards of quality or excellence, from the point of view of the organization; there is monitoring of research project development; internal approval of outcomes; elimination of unethical practices such as: reproduction, without permission, of research results obtained by other researchers, plagiarism, neglect of bioethical norms etc.

PI B.3.1.3 Validation of research

- Min: Research is validated through: educational publications, scientific publications, technological transfer through consultancy centres, scientific parks and other structures for validation and the realization of new products etc. Each academic staff member and researcher produces at least one publication or didactical or scientific achievement per year. The institution participates, through mass media, in the dissemination of its research outcomes.*
- Ref. 1: The research outcomes are appreciated at national level through awards, citations, quotations etc. The publications, patents, and other important outcomes are mentioned in international databases.*

* In certain fields such as Medical, Agricultural, and Technical Sciences, Architecture, Urbanism etc., in which research outcomes are also

validated through projects based on which new products are developed, and certain works for infrastructure development or environment protection are executed, these outcomes will be also taken into consideration.

Criterion B.4 – Financial Management of the Organization

S.B.4.1 Budgeting and accounting

The institution has its own income and expense budget and an adequate accounting system, organized at institutional level, for the financial management of the higher education and its research activities. It has a fiscal code and bank account, other than those of the foundation or association within which it operates.

PI B.4.1.1. The income and expense budget

Min: The institution has an annual income and expense budget approved by the Senate and which is rigorously respected. Annual expenses for salaries in a higher education institution must not exceed the percentage from the total income which ensures its sustainable functioning. In order to obtain its accreditation, the higher education institution must prove that, during its temporary functioning, at least 30% of income earned from student tuition fees has been used for investments in its own material resources. Student tuition fees are calculated in accordance with average schooling costs per academic year within the public education system financed from the budget, for similar Licence, Master's or Doctoral studies, and are communicated to students through various means. Students are informed with regard to the possibilities of financial aid offered by the institution and the way in which tuition fees are used. After three study cycles, subsequent to its legal establishment, a higher education institution must prove that it owns 70% of its education premises and equipment.

PI B.4.1.2 Accounting

Min: In order to obtain and preserve its accreditation status, the institution should provide evidence of its accounting system, at institutional level, through an inventory record, balance sheet, budgeting account and budgetary control statement. It can demonstrate that expenses are made according to current legislation provisions, the value of incomes and their initial destination, as well as the non-profit character of the institution.

Ref. 1: The accounting activity is based on information technology and is always transparent.

PI B.4.1.3 Auditing and public accountability

Min: In order to obtain and preserve its accreditation status, the institution provides evidence of the internal and external auditing of its financial affairs. The balance sheet, the budgeting account and the outcomes of the external auditing of the financial standings are made public following an analysis made by the Senate.

AREA C – Quality Management

The institution has structures, policies, strategies and concrete procedures for managing and assuring the quality of the teaching, learning, and research activities, and for developing its own quality culture. Structures address the organization and functioning of the Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance and its relationships with the Senate, the Councils of the faculties and the Chairs/Departments. Policies address the quality assurance purposes and objectives and the means of accomplishing them. Strategies are focused on objectives and address the way that resources are mobilized in order to achieve in due time the objectives stated at institutional level and by study programmes. A quality culture deals with values, norms and activities practiced in the institution in order to initiate, approve, evaluate and monitor the quality of the teaching and research activities.

Standards (S) and Performance Indicators (PI)

Criterion C.1 – Quality Assurance Strategies and Procedures

S.C.1.1. Quality Assurance Structures and Policies

Structures, policies, and strategies create the institutional framework for developing and concretely monitoring quality, for establishing a quality culture and continually enhancing quality standards.

Performance Indicators

PI C.1.1.1. Organization of the Quality Assurance System

Min: The institution has a central commission and commissions on study programmes which work together

Ref. 1: The commission promotes a quality culture in the institution.

Ref. 2: The commission develops activities to establish qualitative and quantitative benchmarks for evaluating and monitoring quality, by comparing other universities from Romania and abroad.

PI C.1.1.2 Quality Assurance Policies and Strategies

Min: There is a policy programme of the higher education institution, focused on quality, and the means of implementation are specified.

Ref. 1: Implementation strategies, with concrete provisions and deadlines correspond to each policy.

Ref.2: The policies and strategies are put in place in each compartment and stimulate the participation of every member of the teaching and research staff, and also students.

Criterion C.2 – Procedures for the initiation, monitoring and periodic revision of the implemented programmes and activities

S.C.2.1 Approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programmes and their corresponding qualifications

Within the higher education institution, there are regulations regarding the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of each study programme and delivered diploma, which are rigorously and consistently applied.

Performance Indicators

PI C.2.1.1 Existence and implementation of regulations regarding the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programmes

Min: The regulations exist and are implemented.

Ref. 1: The regulations are associated with a system of monitoring study programmes, based on data and information.

Ref. 2: The regulations and the monitoring are associated with periodic - at least annual - evaluations of the quality of each programme and of the institution.

PI C.2.1.2 Correspondences between diplomas and qualifications

Min: The study programmes and diplomas are elaborated and delivered in accordance with the requirements of the academic qualification.

Ref. 1: The study programmes are periodically revised in order for them to correspond to the dynamics of the university and professional qualifications market.

Ref. 2: The study programmes and diplomas are revised by means of European and international comparison, based on professional benchmarks.

Criterion C.3 – Objective and Transparent Procedures for Evaluating Learning Outcomes

S.C.3.1 Student Evaluation

Student evaluation and grading are based on criteria, regulations and techniques which are rigorously and consistently applied.

Performance Indicators

PI C.3.1.1 The higher education institution has regulations for examinations and grading which are rigorously and consistently applied.

Min: The Regulations exist, and are accompanied by specific procedures of acknowledgement and are consistently applied by tenured professors and students. An examination is attended, in addition to the tenured professor, by at least one other specialized member of the teaching staff.

Ref.1: The regulations include detailed procedures/ techniques/methods of implementation, in the form of a set of techniques/methods for examining students which are constantly communicated to all interested parties.

Ref. 2: The regulations and the set of examination techniques/methods are complemented by a system which allows an external evaluator (from outside the institution) to participate in the examination process.

PI C.3.1.2 Integration of evaluation in the teaching and learning plan, by courses and study programmes

Min: Each course is designed so that it combines teaching, learning and evaluation. The procedures for student examination and evaluation are focused on learning outcomes and communicated to students in due time and in detail.

Ref. 1: Diagnostic, formative and summative evaluation assures learning continuity and consistency.

Ref. 2: Evaluation stimulates students towards creative learning, manifested through works elaborated independently, and based on rigorously acquired knowledge.

Criterion C.4 – Procedures for the periodic evaluation of the teaching staff

S.C.4.1 The quality of the teaching and research staff

The teaching staff of the universities must be adequate, from the point of view of its number and functioning basis, to the total number of students, in a field of study, and their qualifications must correspond to specific study programmes and to the quality objectives stated by the higher education institution.

Performance indicators

PI C.4.1.1. Ratio of teaching staff to students

Min: In respect to specific study programme, the higher education institution establishes the ratio that it considers to be optimal for its objectives and its own level of academic quality, between the number of tenured staff based at the higher education institution and the total number of enrolled students. When evaluating quality, a member of the teaching staff is considered to be one that has its main teaching workload at only one higher education institution.

Ref. 1: The optimal ratio between the number of teaching staff and the number of students is established in relation to teaching and learning quality, and also in relation to research quality.

Ref. 2: When establishing the ratio, the high levels of teaching, learning and research quality, are compared with successful universities in Romania and abroad. Procedures for setting professional benchmarks are consistently applied and comparisons are made continually.

PI C.4.1.2 Peer review

Min: A peer review is organized periodically, based on general criteria and collegial preferences.

Ref. 1: A peer review is compulsory and takes place regularly. For each chair and department there is a Commission for annual evaluation of the teaching and research performance of each member of the teaching/research staff and an annual report on the quality of the teaching and research staff.

PI C.4.1.3 Student evaluation of the teaching staff

Min: There is a form for student evaluation of all teaching staff, which is approved by the Senate and is applied optionally, after each academic semester, the results of which are confidential, and are made available only to the Dean, the Rector and the evaluated person.

Ref. 1: Student evaluation of the teaching staff is compulsory. The results of the student evaluation of the teaching staff are discussed individually, processed statistically, by chairs, faculties and higher education institution, and analyzed at faculty and institution level, in order to ensure transparency and to formulate policies regarding the quality of teaching.

PI C.4.1.4 University management's evaluation of the teaching staff

Min: Each teaching staff member evaluates himself/herself self and is also evaluated by the Chair-holder, on annual basis.

Ref. 1: The higher education institution has a specific form for the annual, multi-criteria evaluation of each member of the teaching staff and a system of classification of the teaching and research performances and of the services made to the institution and to the community. The promotion of teaching staff depends on the evaluation results, which

also include the results of the peer review and of the evaluation made by students.

Criterion C.5 – Access to adequate learning resources

S.C.5.1 Learning resources and student services

The resources and services offered to students are sufficient, adequate and relevant for facilitating learning and ensuring a quality student life.

Performance indicators

PI C.5.1.1 Availability of learning resources

Min: The higher education institution ensures learning resources (textbooks, treatises, bibliographic references, readers, anthologies etc.) for each study programme in the libraries, resource centres etc., in classic or electronic format, and free of charge. The higher education institution library must have, besides electronic access, an adequate number of volumes from Romania and abroad, and subscriptions to the main specialized journals from Romania and abroad for each discipline which defines a study programme. Each library has a programme and resources for acquiring books and journals.

Ref. 1: The ratio between the available learning resources and students is so established that each student has free access to any resource, according to the objectives and requirements of the study programmes.

PI C.5.1.2 Teaching as a learning resource

Min: Each teaching staff member has updated teaching strategies for each course, corresponding to the study programme, students' characteristics, form of study, and predefined criteria

Ref. 1: The higher education institution has a laboratory for analysis, research and formulation of innovative teaching/learning strategies, which involves both teaching staff and students.

PI.C.5.1.3: Incentive and remediation programmes

Min: The higher education institution has incentive programmes for stimulating students with high learning performances, as well as remedial programmes aimed to assist and support students with learning difficulties.

Ref. 1: Within the higher education institution there are supplementary tutorage programmes, offered by the teaching staff, which students can join.

PI.C.5.1.4 Student services

Min: The higher education institution offers a minimum number of social, cultural and sports services for students such as: housing for at least 10% of students, sports facilities, different counselling services, which are effectively administered.

Ref. 1: The higher education institution offers various student services and special programmes aimed to ensure a quality student life, which it monitors and evaluates regularly.

Criterion C.6 – Regularly updated database on internal quality assurance

S.C.6.1 Information systems

Universities collect, process, and analyze data and information regarding the quality of education and of student life within the higher education institution.

Performance indicators

PI.C.6.1.1 Databases

Min: The institution has an information system which facilitates the collection, processing, and analysis of data and information relevant for institutional quality evaluation and assurance.

Ref. 1: In addition to information regarding institutional quality, the higher education institution also gathers information about quality in other universities from Romania and abroad, to which it compares itself, and based on which, it formulates differentiated benchmarks.

C.7 – Transparent information of public interest with regards to study programmes, certificates, diplomas, and qualifications

S.C.7.1 – Public Information

The public transparency of data and information, in printed and electronic format, on all qualifications and study programmes, as well as the up-to-date, accuracy and validity of this information, must be constantly demonstrated.

Performance Indicators

PI.C.7.1.1 The provision of public information

Min: The higher education institution and all its faculties must offer quantitative and/or qualitative, current and correct information and data on qualifications, study programmes, diplomas, teaching and research staff, facilities offered to students and information on any other aspect of public interest in general, and of student interest, in particular.

Ref. 1: The information provided to the public by the higher education institution is quantitatively and qualitatively comparable to that provided by other universities in the European Higher Education Area.

C.8 – Operational quality assurance structures, according to the Law

S.C.8.1 The institutional structure for education quality assurance corresponds to the legal provisions and acts on a permanent basis

A Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance has been established, and is structured and acts according to the legislation in force.

Performance indicators

PI.C.8.1.1 A Commission coordinates the implementation of procedures and activities for quality evaluation and assurance

Min: The evaluation procedures and activities regarding the quality of education have been elaborated and approved by the Senate of the higher education institution. The Commission elaborates the annual

internal evaluation report and makes it public by posting or publishing it, including in electronic format, and formulates proposals for improving the quality of education.

Ref.1: The institution continually implements measures for improving the quality of education proposed by the Commission and collaborates with other universities from Romania or abroad in order to identify and adopt good practices in the quality areas.

Table 1. Synthesis of areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators for quality assurance and accreditation

Areas	Criteria	Standards	Performance Indicators
A. Institutional Capacity	A.1 – Institutional, administrative and managerial structures	S.A.1.1 Mission, objectives and academic integrity	PI.A.1.1.1. Mission and objectives PI.A.1.1.2. Academic integrity PI.A.1.1.3. Responsibility and public accountability
		S.A.1.2 Management and administration	PI.A.1.2.1 Management system PI.A.1.2.2. Strategic management PI.A.1.2.3 Effective administration
	A.2 –Material resources	S.A.2.1 Property, equipment, and allocated financial resources	PI.A.2.1.1 Facilities for teaching, research and other activities PI.A.2.1.2 Equipment PI.A.2.1.3 Financial resources PI.A.2.1.4 System of scholarships allocation and other forms of financial aid for students
B. Educational Effectiveness	B.1 – Content of study programmes	S.B.1.1. Student admissions	PI.B.1.1.1 Principles of recruitment and admission's policy PI.B.1.1.2 Admission practices
		S.B.1.2 Structure and range of study programmes	PI.B.1.2.1. Structure of study programmes PI.B.1.2.2. Differentiation in the implementation of study programmes PI.B.1.2.3. Relevance of study programmes
	B.2 – Learning outcomes	S.B.2.1 Validation of academic qualifications	PI.B.2.1.1 Validation by employability within the field of the academic qualification PI.B.2.1.2 Validation by access to the next level of academic studies PI B2.1.3 Level of students' satisfaction with regard to the professional and personal development ensured by the higher education institution PI B2.1.4 Focus on student-centred learning methods PI B2.1.5 Student career guidance
B.3 –Scientific research activities	S.B.3.1 Research programmes	PI.B.3.1.1 Planning of research PI.B.3.1.2 Undertaking research PI.B.3.1.3 Validation of research	

Areas	Criteria	Standards	Performance Indicators
	B.4 – Financial management of the organization	S.B.4.1 Budgeting and accounting	PI.B.4.1.1 Income and expense budget PI.B.4.1.2 Accounting PI.B.4.1.3 Auditing and public accountability
C. Quality Management	C.1 – Quality assurance strategies and procedures	S.C.1.1 Quality assurance structures and policies	PI.C.1.1.1 Organization of the quality assurance system PI.C.1.1.2. Quality assurance policies and strategies
	C.2 – Procedures for initiation, monitoring and periodic revision of the implemented programmes and activities	S.C.2.1 Approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of the study programmes and diplomas corresponding to the level of qualifications	PI.C.2.1.1 Existence and implementation of regulations regarding the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programmes IP.C.2.1.2 Correlations between diplomas and qualifications
	C.3 – Objective and transparent procedures for learning outcomes evaluation	S.C.3.1. Student evaluation	PI.C.3.1.1. The higher education institution has regulations for students' examination and grading which are rigorously and consistently applied PI.C.3.1.2. Integration of examinations in the teaching and learning plan, by courses and study programmes
	C.4 – Procedures for the periodic evaluation of the teaching staff	S.C.4.1 The quality of the teaching and research staff	PI.C.4.1.1 Ratio of teaching staff to students PI.C.4.1.2 Peer review PI.C.4.1.3 Student evaluation of the teaching staff PI.C.4.1.4 University management's evaluation of the teaching staff
	C.5 – Access to adequate learning resources	S.C.5.1 Learning resources and student services	PI.C.5.1.1 Availability of learning resources PI.C.5.1.2 Teaching as a learning resource PI.C.5.1.3 Incentive and remediation programmes PI.C.5.1.4 Student services
	C.6 – Regularly updated database on internal quality assurance	S.C.6.1 Information systems	PI.3.6.1. Databases
	C.7 – Transparent information of public interest with regards study programmes, certificates, diplomas, and qualifications	S.C.7.1 Public information	PI.3.7.1. The provision of public information
	C.8 – Operational quality assurance structures, according to the Law	S.C.8.1 The institutional structure for quality education assurance corresponds to the legal provisions and acts on a permanent basis	PI.C.8.1.1 A Commission coordinates the implementation of the procedures and activities for quality evaluation and assurance

Part III: External Quality Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions

The quality of study and research programmes is achieved and further developed by each higher education institution. The areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators only offer a basis for measuring and evaluating quality in order to facilitate the most efficient possible management of the processes which lead to obtaining the best learning and research outcomes. The internal component of academic quality assurance, namely the institutional one, is essential to quality management. The external component of peer review of quality is complementary to the internal component and addresses the same purposes of continuous quality improvement.

An external evaluation of academic quality is made in the following cases:

- a) for the provisional authorisation to operate for a study programme (programme authorisation), or a higher education services provider (institutional authorisation);
- b) for the accreditation of a study programme (programme accreditation), or of a higher education institution (institutional accreditation);
- c) for the periodic certification, at five-year intervals, of the academic quality of the education and research services in an already accredited higher education institution.

The areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators are mostly the same for the provisional authorisation to operate, accreditation and quality assurance. The only difference consists in their proportion and refers to the difference between the authorisation or accreditation of a programme, and the institutional authorisation or accreditation. A study programme only represents a part of an institution or university and from here results the difference of proportion.

3.1. Stages of academic quality evaluation

There are three successive stages of academic quality evaluation:

- a) the elaboration, by the provider or institution, of a **quality self-evaluation report**;
- b) the **external evaluation** of quality;
- c) the implementation of **recommendations** resulting from self-evaluation and external evaluation.

The **self-evaluation report** is an official document elaborated by the provider, institution or university which applies for the provisional authorisation to operate (for a programme or an institution), the accreditation of a programme of an institution, or the external evaluation of quality assurance.

The self-evaluation report has two parts:

- a) the **analytical part** is of a narrative type, has 20-40 pages, which varies by the size of the object being evaluated (study programme or institution), and represents the conclusions reached by the management of the institution/study programme and by the academic community, including students, with regard to strengths and weaknesses, successes, threats, uncertainties or failures of quality assurance and to the future actions for improvement, in relation to the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in Part II of the **Methodology**. The report is presented in written and electronic format.
- b) the **justification part** includes documents, charts, tables, illustrations, etc., meant to support the analysis presented in the first part. These are complementary and based on data and information which exist in the institutions' databases.

In a self-evaluation report for provisional authorisation to operate or accreditation, there is also an Introduction which mentions the achievement of each normative requirement formulated in Part IV of the **Methodology**.

The self-evaluation report takes as compulsory references the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in this **Methodology**, so that its main chapters coincide with the three areas (institutional capacity, educational effectiveness, and

quality management). In addition to the performance indicators mentioned in the **Methodology**, the self-evaluation report may also refer to other indicators. The justifying documents and the self-evaluation statements must mention the accomplishment, at least, of the minimum levels. In the case of exceeding the minimum level for an indicator or standard, the respective level is demonstrated through justifying documents in the form of Standard of Reference specific to the programme or institution. Within an institution or university with study programmes already accredited, descriptions and references are not made for every single programme. One or another programme is mentioned only for illustrative purposes. However, for the external evaluation of quality, complete data and information on each study programme organized by the higher education institution will be made available.

The *external evaluation* includes three successive activities:

- a) the analysis of the self-evaluation report in relation to the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in the **Methodology**;
- b) a study visit to the programme or institution by a team of three evaluators for a 3-4-day period, in order to verify the correlation of data, information and self-evaluation statements, on one hand, and the concrete institutional reality, on the other hand; the results of the visits are presented in an external evaluation report which also includes conclusions and recommendations;
- c) the finalization of the recommendations with regard to quality improvement, after being discussed with representatives of the institution and/or study programme, approved by the RAQAHE Council, and the external evaluation report has been made public.

The main conclusion, in the case of provisional authorisation to operate and of the accreditation, consists of the granting or not granting of the respective status. In the case of an external evaluation of quality assurance at accredited universities, the conclusion of the report consists either in the approval of the quality status and formulation of minor recommendations for improvement, the achievement of which falls under the higher education institution's responsibility, or an acknowledgment that the minimum quality standards have not been accomplished. In the latter case the provisions of Art. 34 of GEO are applied.

3.2. External evaluation standards

An external evaluation of quality assurance or authorisation and accreditation, applies the European standards mentioned in the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”, adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in Bergen, in May 2005. These standards are the following:

a) Use of internal quality assurance procedures

An external evaluation of quality is preceded by a self-evaluation report and is based on the institutional accomplishment of the criteria, standards, and performance indicators specific to the internal quality assurance, as presented in the **Methodology**.

b) Implementation of external quality assurance processes

External quality evaluation processes must be clearly defined, discussed with all interested parties, published, and disseminated. Prior to the organization of an external evaluation process, the RAQAHE Council and the management of the institution must analyze the implications and the applications of the procedure.

c) Decision-making criteria

Any recommendation and formal decision which results from the application of the external evaluation of quality assurance must be based on explicit and transparent criteria which are consistently and coherently applied.

d) Correlation of the procedures and processes applied in the external quality evaluation with the purposes and objectives of quality assurance

Quality assurance and external evaluation of quality are components of the larger processes and procedures for quality assurance and improvement in higher education and must be applied as such. In order to accomplish its purposes and objectives, the procedures and process of the external evaluation of quality assurance must be elaborated and applied so that the following conditions are observed: the external evaluators must have the capacities, competencies and experience necessary for external evaluation; the RAQAHE Council must select and include in the Register of Experts those academics from Romania and abroad

which are known for their professional competence, moral integrity and expertise in the field of quality assurance; the RAQAHE Council must offer the experts the possibility of training in the field of external quality evaluation; students must be involved in an external evaluation; whenever is possible, international experts must be involved; evaluative statements must always be based on justifying documents and concrete and convincing examples; the recognition of the importance of quality improvement, and of enhancing quality performance are fundamental for the process of quality assurance.

e) *The Evaluation Report*

The evaluation report must be edited in a clear style, accessible to all those interested. The recommendations and conclusions are adequately emphasized in the text. The evaluation report is published and disseminated. Readers must have the possibility to express their points of view.

f) *Implementation of the recommendations*

When the nature of the conclusions and recommendations requires time and special forms of implementation, an implementation plan must be elaborated which includes provisions and special deadlines.

g) *The periodicity of the external evaluation*

Any accredited higher education institution is externally evaluated on a periodic basis, at intervals not exceeding five years.

h) *System analysis*

Each year the RAQAHE Council elaborates a synthetic report on the quality assurance in Romanian higher education. The report also includes comparative data or information from other countries from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and from outside this area. The report is submitted to the Minister of Education and Research, and then published.

i) *Information for establishing institutional benchmarking for quality*

The RAQAHE Council provides universities, on a public basis, with the information and data allowing them to elaborate standards of reference through benchmarking techniques.

j) *Permanent improvement of the RAQAHE Council's performance*

The RAQAHE Council must permanently improve its own procedures, techniques and standards, with the cooperation of the stakeholders. The RAQAHE Council presents annually a report on the results of its own activities and submits this report to accredited higher education institutions for analysis and consultation in order to establish quality assurance priorities.

3.3. Auditing of an external quality evaluation

In order to audit an external quality evaluation, the RAQAHE Council establishes the Consultative and Auditing Commission which has the following competencies:

- a) proposes and finalizes, on a contractual basis, after receiving the RAQAHE Council approval, the elaboration of certain studies, textbooks, guides etc. for the improvement of the techniques of quality assurance and accreditation;
- b) audits the activities of external evaluation of quality assurance or of authorisation and accreditation, at RAQAHE Council's request, based on a specific methodology approved by the RAQAHE Council.

3.4. Relevance of external evaluation, standards, criteria and performance indicators

The areas, criteria, standards, and performance indicators mentioned in the **Methodology** correspond to the provisions of GEO No. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education.

The areas, criteria, standards, and performance indicators mentioned in the **Methodology** are implemented by all higher education institutions for both obtaining a provisional authorisation to operate or the accreditation and the evaluation of the quality of the educational activities. The method of implementation of the elements specified in the **Methodology** leads to the following implications compulsory for the spirit and practice of quality assurance in higher education:

- a) in order to develop a quality culture and to build databases justifying the internal quality management, each higher education institution must address **at least** the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators presented in the **Methodology**;
- b) an external evaluation of the academic quality must address each area and criterion so that the minimum level is reached for all performance indicators linked to associated standards;
- c) non-fulfilment of the minimum level of the established performance indicators, meaning that the quality standards have not been met, leads to the application of the provisions of Art. 34 of GEO;
- d) the higher education institution may opt for higher levels for each performance indicator in order to establish its own Standards of Reference; the identification of these higher levels consists of benchmarking and is based on comparisons with successful universities from the EHEA or worldwide. Upon consolidation of its operating, the RAQAHE Council will offer supplementary and optional information on national and European variations of standards and performance indicators.
- e) quality is a fundamental criterion for financing education from public sources. Within the higher education framework the comparative inter-institutional evaluation of the academic study programmes requires differentiated funding according to the quality of the offered study programme. The RAQAHE Council collaborates with the National Higher Education Funding Council (NHEFC) in order to establish the quality indicators used for financing, compatible with the performance indicators presented in the **Methodology**.

Part IV. Applications Differentiated by Study Cycles

The **Methodology** offers the general framework of quality assurance in higher education. The areas, criteria, standards, and performance indicators mentioned in the **Methodology** are formulated so that they preserve their applicability in the areas of quality assurance and accreditation for any type of institution or higher education provider, and for any study programme. However, certain differentiations are necessary. This part offers the differentiating details which regard:

- a) the provisional authorisation to operate and the accreditation of higher education institutions awarding Licence Degrees;
- b) the accreditation of Master's Degree awarding institutions (MAI);
- c) the accreditation of Doctorate Degree awarding institutions (DAI).

4.1. Provisional authorisation to operate and accreditation

The provisional authorisation to operate for a higher education institution or a study programme, or their accreditation, is part of the quality assurance in higher education. The provisional authorisation to operate once obtained, gives the right to organize and carry out the educational process and organize, if necessary, entrance examinations. Accreditation is subsequent to authorisation and after being finalized gives the right to deliver diplomas, certificates and other study documents recognized at national and international level and to organize graduation or Licence Degree examinations as well as Master's Degree and Doctoral studies which have already been accredited.

4.1.1. Provisional authorisation to operate and accreditation procedures

The procedures for provisional authorisation and for accreditation consist of the following the stages of internal evaluation (self-evaluation) and external evaluation based on documents, records, and official papers proving that criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in the **Methodology** have been met.

In higher education authorisation must be granted for each study programme of the first study cycle which leads to distinct academic qualification. The programmes specific to

the Master's and Doctoral study cycles must also be submitted, individually, to external evaluation in order for them to be accredited. The procedure applied for the provisional authorisation to operate includes the following steps:

- a) an organization interested in providing higher education services elaborates a self-evaluation report for each study programme taking into consideration the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators;
- b) the self-evaluation report is submitted to the accreditation department of the RAQAHE Council together with the request for the initiation of the procedure for external evaluation and provisional authorisation to operate;
- c) the accreditation department appoints a commission of experts in external evaluation including at least one member from a national minority when evaluating a programme or a provider in the language of a national minority, which analyzes the self-evaluation report, verifies through visits to the applicant institution, the meeting of the Standards and elaborates its own evaluation report;
- d) the RAQAHE Council validates the experts' report by verifying the observance of the methodology for external evaluation and proposes to the Ministry of Education and Research the granting or not granting of the provisional authorisation to operate, accordingly;
- e) provisional authorisation to operate is granted to organizations interested in carrying out higher education activities by government decision at the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research based on the RAQAHE Council's approval.

The accreditation procedure includes the following steps:

- a) an organization provisionally authorized to operate elaborates a self-evaluation report using as terms of reference the areas, criteria, standards, and performance indicators;
- b) the self-evaluation report is submitted to the accreditation department of the RAQAHE Council together with the request for the initiation of the accreditation procedure;

- c) the deadline for submitting the application for accreditation cannot exceed three years from the date of the first cohort of students, which may lead to the cancellation of the provisional authorisation to operate;
- d) the accreditation department of the RAQAHE Council appoints a commission of evaluation and accreditation experts from which at least one member comes from a national minority when a programme or provider in the language of a national minority is to be evaluated, which analyzes the self-evaluation report, verifies, through visits to the applicant institution, the achievement of the requirements of the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators and elaborates its own evaluation report;
- e) the RAQAHE Council validates the report of experts through verifying the observance of the Methodology for external evaluation and proposes to the Ministry of Education and Research the accreditation or non-accreditation of the applicant institution, accordingly;
- f) for organizations which carry out higher education activities, the accreditation is granted by Law, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research based on the RAQAHE Council's approval.

A decision on an application for provisional authorisation to operate for a study programme is communicated by the RAQAHE Council within six months from the application's registration date. An authorized study programme may be run in the academic year following the date of delivery of the RAQAHE Council's approval and of the Government's Decision. An application for the accreditation of a study programme is formulated by the education provider after three successive cohorts of students having graduated the study programme. A decision on the application for accreditation is communicated by the RAQAHE Council within six months from the date of the registration of the application, based on the self-evaluation report as well as on the external evaluation made by the RAQAHE Council.

Between the delivery of the provisional authorisation to operate and the formulation of the accreditation application, the RAQAHE Council organizes periodic visits for external evaluation of the application of the criteria and standards of quality assurance.

4.1.2. Objectives of provisional authorisation and accreditation

The general objectives of the external evaluation in view of accreditation are:

- the analysis of the quality of the study programmes offered by the higher education institutions and, where necessary, the support of the process of the elimination of education quality dysfunctions and deficiencies;
- support to the permanent improvement of quality of education through dissemination of good practices and encouragement of experience exchange between universities which offer similar study programmes;
- ensuring the process of effective and accessible information to the public with regard to the quality of the study programmes by publishing the institutions' own evaluation reports.

The RAQAHE Council offers public information through its own evaluation reports on two distinct and independent aspects:

- taking as reference the *quality standards* for a discipline or a study programme, the RAQAHE report appreciates the extent to which the foreseen learning outcomes established by the provider of the study programme itself can be actually reached within the respective institution;
- the observance of the quality of the learning opportunities is focused on the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process, on the academic support through adequate learning resources of the progress achieved by students in different programmes.

The specific objectives of the temporary authorisation and accreditation are the following:

- a) to assure the academic communities, the stakeholders and the public at large that the education providing organization, authorized or accredited to organize study programmes demonstrates that it complies to minimum quality standards of a higher education institution;
- b) to promote the engagement of the education providing organization in the direction of the continuous development of academic quality illustrated through learning and research outcomes;

- c) to support higher education institutions in developing a quality management culture as well as demonstrating their achievements through evidence and relevant documents;
- d) to induce the education providing organization to evaluate itself and to cooperate in its external evaluation in order to assure the improvement of quality;
- e) to encourage the education providing organization in cooperating with other higher education institutions in accomplishing, monitoring and comparing academic quality;
- f) to identify and make public any attempt to offer a programme which does not correspond to the minimum standards of academic quality.

4.2. Normative requirements regarding provisional authorisation and accreditation of Licence Degree study programmes

A provisional authorisation precedes the actual development of educational services by an initiator of a Licence study programme. The provisional authorisation is a process which consists, on the one hand, of verifying the extent to which the future provider satisfies the legal provisions through which its initiative can develop into quality outcomes and, on the other hand, in analyzing its capacity for implementing, according to the law, the proposed study programme. In view of the accreditation, the operational experience and the degree of development of a quality culture are taken into consideration.

In this respect, the self-evaluation report presents, in an explicit and documented way, data and information which correspond to a set of normative requirements, with organizational relevance. The other three chapters refer to the level of compliance with the criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in Part II of this **Methodology** for the three areas of quality assurance: institutional capacity, educational effectiveness, and quality management.

By studying the documents submitted by the provider of the service for the authorisation or accreditation applied for, and by visiting the provider's premises, the RAQAHE Council verifies the compliance with the following **compulsory normative requirements**:

1. With regard to the legal framework of the organization and functioning of a higher education institution as an education providing organization, the mission and objectives of higher education institution are as follows:
 - a) in order to obtain its provisional authorisation to operate and accreditation, a higher education institution must make proof of its own legal status established through a foundation document;
 - b) a higher education institution which applies for provisional authorisation to operate or for accreditation must prove that it has a clearly formulated educational and research mission;
 - c) the mission of the higher education institution has clear objectives which can be achieved in accordance with the legal provisions;
 - d) the mission of the higher education institution includes elements of specificity and opportunity in accordance with the national qualifications framework and the requirements of the labour market;
2. Teaching staff:
 - a) according to the present Government's Decision, the teaching staff is the staff which runs educational activities in the respective higher education institution;
 - b) the teaching staff must meet the legal requirements for occupying teaching positions;
 - c) the teaching staff tenured in a higher education institution, namely the one at which he/she is based, is taken into consideration when granting the provisional authorisation or the accreditation, for a single teaching load established according to the Law;
 - d) in order to assure the quality of education activities, tenured teaching staff in a higher education institution cannot cover in a single academic year more than three teaching loads, regardless of the education institution in which they work;
 - e) higher education teaching staff tenured in accordance with the Law who retire at the age limit or for other reasons, lose their tenured positions and are considered associate teaching staff, and they cannot cover more than a teaching workload in the respective education institution;
 - f) in order to obtain the provisional authorisation to operate, a higher education institution must have, at each institutional structure for each programme of the Licence cycle that leads to a distinct academic qualification, at least 70% of total teaching positions

- included in the teaching load report, constituted in accordance with current legal provisions, covered with tenured teaching staff according to the legal provisions, out of which at least 25%, but no more than 50%, must be professors and associate professors. The number of full-time teaching staff must be higher than 40% of the total teaching positions established in accordance with the legal provisions;
- g) in order to obtain accreditation, a higher education institution must have at each institutional structure for each study programme of the Licence Degree cycle which leads to a distinct academic qualification, at least 70% of the positions included in the teaching staff roster, constituted in accordance with current legal provisions, covered with tenured teaching staff holders of a regular teaching position or of a reserved position according to the legal provisions, out of which at least 25%, but no more than 50%, must be professors and associate professors;
 - h) the number of teaching staff whose tenure in higher education has been granted according to the legal provisions, taken into consideration for the provisional authorisation to operate or the accreditation of each institutional structure and each study programme of the Licence Degree cycle, is the one resulted when considering the full-time and part-time positions from the teaching staff roster which these cover in the respective structure or programme;
 - i) non-tenured associate teaching staff may occupy, on a temporary basis, a vacant position from the teaching staff roster of the higher education institution which is subject of the RAQAHE Council's recognition, provided it meets the legal requirements for occupying the respective positions;
 - j) chair-holders (heads of subjects) must be PhD holders or PhD candidates in the field of the occupied teaching positions; the other teaching staff must have had initial training and the competencies in the field of the taught subject;
 - k) in order to obtain accreditation, a higher education institution must prove that the chair-holders have elaborated courses and other academic works necessary for the teaching process, which fully cover the topics of the respective disciplines in the syllabus;
 - l) the management of the higher education institution ensures the reproduction of the above-mentioned academic works, and provides an adequate number of copies for students;

- m) associate teaching staff have the obligation to communicate in writing to the head of the institution where they hold their main teaching position as well as to the one where they are employed as associates, and the number of teaching hours given as associates;
 - n) the teaching staff which occupy positions of junior assistant or assistant must hold a certified pedagogical training;
 - o) teaching staff who are highly specialized in a certain field and who are over the statutory retirement age must not exceed 20% of the total number of teaching positions;
 - p) in order to obtain accreditation the management of the higher education institution (Rector, Vice-Rector, Deans, Vice-Dean, and Head of Department) must be tenured teaching staff, having their main teaching load in the institution, or in the internal management structure in which they function, tenured professors or tenured associate professors, and they must not be holders of reserved positions;
 - q) the higher education institution ensures for at least a Licence Degree cycle the corresponding number of competent teaching staff to cover the subjects offered in the curricula;
3. The content of the teaching and learning process:
- a) in order to obtain the provisional authorisation to operate, the curricula must include the fundamental disciplines, the specialized disciplines in the field and the complementary disciplines organized in compulsory disciplines and optional disciplines according to the normative requirements established at national level;
 - b) the study disciplines from the curricula are organized in logical succession and aim to fulfil the following requirements:
 - a clear definition and delimitation of the general and special competencies, by Licence study fields in correlation with the corresponding competencies of Master's studies;
 - compatibility with the national qualifications framework;
 - compatibility with similar plans and study programmes from the member states of the European Union and from other countries, the weight of the disciplines being expressed in ECTS study credits;
 - c) the study disciplines included in the curricula are made up of syllabuses in which are specified the objectives of the disciplines, the basic thematic content, the distribution of

- the number of teaching, seminar, and practice hours, by topic, the student evaluation, and a minimum bibliography;
- d) the list of disciplines included in the curriculum and their content, which are specified in the syllabuses, correspond to the licence field and the study programme for which the respective curricula have been elaborated, and correspond to the declared mission;
 - e) the academic year will be structured around two semesters averaging 14-weeks, with 20-28 hours per week for the first study cycle (Licence Degree cycle) depending on the field of study;
 - f) each semester will have 30 ECTS study credits for the compulsory disciplines, regardless of the form of study—full-time, evening, part-time, distance learning.
 - g) “evening”, “part-time”, “distance” or other forms of study – which do not require compulsory campus attendance cannot be offered unless “full time” study form already exists;
 - h) the optional disciplines, regardless of the semester in which they are scheduled are finalized with an “examination test”, and their corresponding credit points are given in addition to the 30 study credits of the respective semester;
 - i) the ratio between the teaching hours and the other applied educational activities (seminars, laboratory activities, projects, traineeships etc;) must be of 1/1, with no more than +/-20 % admitted deviation;
 - j) in Licence study programme for which curricula have been elaborated, a 2-3-week traineeship per year beginning with the second year of study must be included, as well as a period for the elaboration of a diploma paper, during the final year of study;
 - k) for traineeship periods, the higher education institution has established collaboration agreements, contracts or other collaboration documents with the practical units, which specify: the place and period of training; the organization mode and guiding principles; the representatives of the higher education institution and of the practical unit responsible for the traineeship etc.;
 - l) at least 50% of the testing activities of the study disciplines included in the curriculum are examinations;

4. Students

- a) student recruitment observes the institutions' own admission procedures;
- b) student registration for a competitive entrance examination is only made on the basis of a baccalaureate diploma or other equivalent documents;
- c) the size of the study formations (series, groups, subgroups) is so established that it ensures an efficient development of the education process;
- d) from the faculty timetable it results that the programme submitted for evaluation can be carried out in normal conditions, as required by Law;
- e) the number of students moving up to the next year of study must represent at least 40% of the total number of students of the respective year of study;
- f) student's learning outcomes for a study period must be certified by a transcript of records;
- g) the institution regulated the procedures for student progress from a year of study to the next one, based on accumulated ECTS study credits, as well as the procedures for undertaking two study years in one;
- h) h) students' transfer between higher education institutions, faculties and specializations is internally regulated and it is not made during the academic year;
- i) in order for the institution to be accredited, the first three cohorts of graduates of the higher education institution provisionally authorised to operate must sit for the final examination at an accredited institution which has the same licence domain or study programme established by RAQAHE. The Board of Examiners cannot be attended by members of the teaching staff from the faculties or the study programmes where the candidates to the final examination pursued their studies.
- j) in order to obtain the accreditation of a study programme, the institution must prove that:
 - o at least 51% of the total number of the first three cohorts of graduates passed the final examination;
 - o at least 40 % of the first three series of graduates are legally employed in working positions which correspond to their academic and professional qualification;

- k) diplomas for graduates of higher education institutions provisionally authorised to operate, who sat for their final examination at another accredited higher education institution established by RAQAHE and passed the final examination, are delivered by the institutions that organised the final examinations and must specify the name of the institution where the graduates pursued their studies. The respective diplomas are recognized by the Ministry of Education and Research;
- l) the certificate and diploma awarding observes the current legal provisions;

5. Scientific Research

- a) the licence domain, that is the study programme submitted for evaluation, has its own research plan, which is part of the faculty's strategic plan, and implicitly of the institution's plan, certified by documents kept within the chairs, departments, faculty etc.;
- b) the research themes included in the plan correspond to the scientific area of the licence domain, study programme etc., submitted for evaluation;
- c) the teaching staff carry out research activities within the scientific disciplines included in their teaching load;
- d) the teaching and research staff carry out scientific research activities validated by: publication of their outcomes in specialized journals published in Romania or abroad by publishing houses recognised by The National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education (NCSRHE); contributions presented in scientific sessions, symposia, seminars etc. in Romania and/or abroad; cooperation contracts, expertise, and/or consultancy given on a contractual basis or according to convention made with partners from Romania or abroad, evaluated and certified by specialized commissions etc.;
- e) research outcomes obtained within the laboratories of the education structure submitted for evaluation are validated through publications, patents etc.;
- f) the faculty organises, together with its teaching staff, researchers, and graduates, scientific sessions, symposia, conferences, roundtables, their contributions and outcomes being published in scientific bulletins which bare an ISBN or ISSN, or in journals dedicated to the organised activity.

6. Equipment

- a) The equipment owned by the higher education institution which is subject to evaluation must correspond to the standards for a quality education process;
- b) In order to obtain the provisional authorisation to operate, the institution must prove with appropriate documents (property documents, rent contracts, inventory records, invoices etc.) that for the study programme submitted to evaluation it has, for at least 2 years in advance of the study year:
 - owned or rented facilities adequate to the education process;
 - owned or rented laboratories with adequate equipment for all compulsory disciplines included in the curriculum, the syllabus of which foresees that kind of activities;
 - adequate software and the related licence for the disciplines included in the curriculum;
 - a library with a reading room and its own fund of publications, adequate to the disciplines included in the curricula, by study cycles (Licence and Master's Degrees)
- c) The capacity of the spaces allocated for the study programme which is subject to evaluation must be of:
 - minimum 1 sqm /place, in classrooms;
 - minimum 1.4 sqm. /place, in seminar rooms;
 - minimum 1.5 sqm./place, in reading rooms;
 - minimum 2.5 sqm./place, in IT laboratories and in laboratories for disciplines which require the use of a computer;
 - minimum 4 sqm./place, in laboratories for technical, experimental and design disciplines, etc;
- d) The number of places in teaching rooms, seminar rooms and laboratories must be correlated with the size of the study formations (series, groups, sub-groups, etc.) according to the norms established by the Ministry of Education and Research
- e) Applied works for the main disciplines included in the curricula are carried out in laboratories provided with the necessary IT equipment so that, at the level of a study formation, one computer is available for no more than 2 students in the Licence

Degree study cycle) and one computer per student is available in the Master's study cycle;

- f) The libraries of a higher education institution must ensure:
- a number of places in the reading rooms corresponding to at least 10 % of the total number of students;
 - its own fund of publications from Romanian and foreign specialized literature, which must consist of a sufficient number of copies, completely covering the disciplines included in the curricula. At least 50% of the fund of publications must represent book titles or specialized courses for the study field submitted to evaluation, which have been published within the last ten years by renown publishing houses;
 - the fund of publications must include a sufficient number of copies in order to cover the necessities of all students enrolled in the study cycle and the academic year for which the respective discipline is foreseen;
 - a sufficient number of subscriptions to Romanian and foreign publications and periodicals, corresponding to the stated mission;

7. Financial Activity

- a) In order to obtain the provisional authorisation to operate or the accreditation of a study programme or of a higher education structure, an applicant institution must prove that it has its own income and expenses budget for higher education activities, a fiscal code and a bank account, other than those of the foundation or the association within which it operates;
- b) Annual expenses for salaries in a higher education institution must not exceed 65 % of the total revenue;
- c) In order to obtain its accreditation, a higher education institution must prove that during its provisional authorisation period it used at least 30 % of its annual income for investments in its own material resources;
- d) In order to obtain accreditation, a higher education institution must prove that during its provisional authorisation period it proceeded to the organization of its accounting activity by establishing an inventory record, a balance sheet, a budgeting account and

a budget control statement, which demonstrate that all expenses were made in accordance with the legislation in force, the obtained revenues and their stated destination, as well as the non-profit profile of the institution;

- e) Students' tuition fees are calculated in accordance to average schooling costs per academic year, within the public education system financed from the budget, for similar Licence, Master's or Doctoral studies, and are communicated to students through various means;
- f) Students are informed with regard to opportunities of financial aid offered by the institution and the way the tuition fees are used.
- g) After three study cycles, subsequent to its legal establishment, a higher education institution must prove that it owns 70% of the education premises and their necessary equipment.
- h) In order to obtain the accreditation, as well as during their further operating, higher education institutions must make proof of the internal and external auditing of their financial activity, by a prestigious auditing company, nationally and/or internationally recognized. The results of the audit together with the annual analysis of the income and expense budget will be discussed in the Senate, and then made available to the public.

8. Institutional Structure and Management

- a) In order to obtain its accreditation, a higher education institution must prove that the legal provisions with regard to the election of the governing bodies (the faculty council, the Senate) as well as of the governing staff at the level of departments, chairs, faculties (dean, vice-dean, scientific secretary), and institution (rector, vice-rector, scientific secretary) have been observed;
- b) In order to obtain the provisional authorisation to operate or the accreditation, the institution of higher education must prove that it has a University Charta, its own general internal regulations, and specific regulations regarding student's professional activity;
- c) When obtaining its accreditation and afterwards, a higher education institution must prove that the legal provisions regarding the publicity and the appointment to teaching positions on a competitive basis have been observed;

- d) In order to obtain the provisional authorisation to operate and the accreditation, a higher education institution must prove the existence of an organisation chart filled in with staff of its own, corresponding professionally to the occupancy requirements of the respective positions;
- e) In order to obtain the provisional authorisation to operate and the accreditation, a higher education institution must prove that it keeps record of student's professional activity according to the legislation applicable to the Ministry of Education and Research in the field, on forms homologated on this purpose (mark sheets, registration books, transcripts of records, diplomas, etc.);
- f) During the provisional authorisation to operate period, a higher education institution must observe the standards based on which the authorisation has been granted. The higher education institutional structures and the operating conditions for the study programmes, as well as for the specialisations for which the provisional authorisation to operate has been granted, can be modified, only based on re-initiation of the evaluation procedures. The RAQAHE Council and other public authorities authorised by Law should undertake verification activities on an annual basis or whenever it is considered necessary, and free of charge. When the non-fulfilment of the quality standards is acknowledged, the provisions of Art. 34 of GEO 75/2005 with regard to the quality of education must be applied.

Each department will detail the mentioned normative requirements by licence domain and by study programme, in relation with the specific of the specialization and the study form.

The observance of these compulsory normative requirements must be certified by justifying documents. The certified information corresponds to each requirement and is presented in the first chapter of the evaluation report. The related justifying documents are presented in the annexes. The first chapter of the self-evaluation report is followed by other three chapters, which cover the three quality assurance areas: institutional capacity, educational effectiveness, quality management.

4.3. Methodological stages of provisional authorisation to operate and accreditation of Licence Degree study programmes

Based on the GEO 75/2005 regarding quality assurance in education, the RAQAHE Interim Council elaborates the methodology for external evaluation, the methodology for provisional authorisation to operate, and the methodology for accreditation.

(1) Methodology for granting a provisional authorisation to operate

The methodology for granting a provisional authorisation to operate to a study and qualification programme or any higher education structure requires the following working stages:

- a) based on the application for the initiation of the external evaluation procedures, in view of obtaining provisional authorisation to operate, submitted by the education provider to the accreditation department of the RAQAHE Council, the RAQAHE Council decides on the initiation of the external evaluation procedure, provided the following two conditions are simultaneously fulfilled:
 - the education provider submitted, together with the application, an internal self-evaluation report, elaborated according to the provisions of the Art. 10 of GEO 75/2005, regarding the higher education structure for which the provisional authorisation to operate is solicited;
 - the education provider proves with documents that the fee required by Law for granting a provisional authorisation to operate has been paid;
- b) the accreditation department of the RAQAHE Council appoints a commission consisting of three experts in evaluation and accreditation, selected from the RAQAHE Roster of Evaluators, which are specialized in the field of the higher education structure submitted for evaluation. This commission analyzes the internal evaluation report and verifies, through a study visit at the applicant institution, the observance of the standards by areas and criteria provided by Art. 10 of the GEO 75/2005, approved through Government's Decision. The verification results are registered by the members of the Commission in the "The Study Visit Record in View of Granting the Provisional Authorisation to Operate", which is signed by all members of the Commission. Based on the Study Visit

- Record, the members of the Commission elaborate the “Evaluation Report in View of Granting the Provisional Authorisation to Operate”, in which they propose and endorse with their signature the granting or not granting the provisional authorisation to operate;
- c) The Evaluation Report made by experts is submitted for analysis to the RAQAHE department specialised in the fundamental science domain in which the education structure submitted for evaluation integrates. The RAQAHE specialised department validates the experts’ report by verifying the observance of the methodology for external evaluation, and then submit it to the RAQAHE Council in order to be discussed and validated;
 - d) The RAQAHE Council, based on the discussion conclusions, elaborate the “Council’s Report” and submit it to the Ministry of Education and Research together with the proposal for granting or, as the case may be, not granting the provisional authorisation to operate for the applicant education structure. The proposal for granting or not granting the provisional authorisation to operate is validated by vote of the members of the Council. Half plus one of the total number of members of the Council, which means eight votes “in favour”, must agree with the respective proposal. This report must bear the signatures of the delegate of the RAQAHE Council for the respective fundamental science field as well as of the members of the RAQAHE Bureau;
 - e) The Ministry of Education and Research, based on the RAQAHE Council’s approval, drafts the Government’s Decision and submits it to the Government in order for the latter to issue the Government’s Decision for granting the provisional authorisation to operate;
 - f) If the RAQAHE Council, while carrying out the annual monitoring of the study programmes provisionally authorised to operate, acknowledge that, following the first two operating years, the standards considered when issuing the authorisation have not been met and that the necessary measures in view of accreditation have not been taken, it may propose to the Ministry of Education and Research to cancel the provisional authorisation to operate of the respective higher education structure.

(2). Accreditation Methodology

The methodology for granting the accreditation of a study and qualification programme or any higher education structure requires the following three working stages:

- a) based on the request for initiating the procedure for external evaluation and accreditation, submitted to the RAQAHE Department for Accreditation by the education provider, the RAQAHE Council decide on the initiation of the external evaluation procedure, provided the following conditions are simultaneously fulfilled:
- the interval between the graduation date of the first cohort of students and the date of the application for accreditation is no longer than two years. In case the deadline is not observed, the delay is sanctioned by cancelling the provisional authorisation to operate (Art. 31 (c));
 - the education provider submitted, together with the application, an internal evaluation report, elaborated in conformity with the provisions of Art. 10 of the GEO 75/2005, regarding the education structure which applies for accreditation, using as terms of reference the standards specific to the accreditation stage;
 - the institution proves with documents that the fee required by Law for the accreditation activity has been paid.
- b) The RAQAHE Accreditation Department appoints a Commission consisting of three experts in evaluation and accreditation from those enlisted in the RAQAHE Roster of Evaluators, which are specialized in the field of higher education structure submitted for evaluation. This Commission analyzes the internal evaluation report and verifies, through study visits at the applicant institution, the observance of the standards for areas and criteria provided by Art. 10 of the GEO 75/2005 approved by Government's Decision. The verification results are registered by the members of the Commission in the "Record of the Study Visit in View of Accreditation", which is signed by all members of the Commission. Based on the "Record of the Study Visit in View of Accreditation", the members of the commission elaborate "The Evaluation Report in View of Accreditation" in which they propose, and endorse with their signature, the accreditation or as the case may be, the non-accreditation of the education structure for which the accreditation has been solicited;
- c) The Evaluation Report elaborated by experts is submitted for analysis to the RAQAHE department specialized in the fundamental science field to which the higher education structure submitted for evaluation pertains, which validates the experts' report by

- verifying the observance of the evaluation methodology and submits the report to the RAQAHE Council in order to be discussed and validated.
- d) Based on the discussion conclusions, the RAQAHE Council elaborates the “Council’s Report” and submits it to the Ministry of Education and Research together with the proposal for granting or, as the case may be, not granting the accreditation for the applicant education structure. The proposal for granting or not granting the accreditation is validated by vote of the members of the Council. Half plus one of the total number of members of the Council, which means eight votes “in favour”, must agree with the respective proposal. This report must bear the signatures of the delegate of the RAQAHE Council for the respective fundamental science field as well as of the members of the RAQAHE Bureau;
 - e) The Ministry of Education and Research, based on the RAQAHE Council’s approval, drafts the Government’s Decision and submits it to the Government in order for the latter to issue the Government’s Decision for granting the accreditation. In the case of higher education providers, the accreditation of institutions, that is of universities, is made by Law promoted by the Government, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research, and based on the RAQAHE approval;
 - f) In case RAQAHE acknowledge that the quality standards have not been met, it informs the Ministry of Education and Research, which applies the provisions of Art. 34 of the GEO 75/2005 with regard to quality assurance in education.

4.4. Accreditation of Master’s Degree awarding institutions

Within the 2006/2007 academic year, existing Master’s Degree programmes are carried out until they are completed. For the 2007/2008 academic year, as well as for the next academic years, entrance examinations will be organized only for Master’s Degree study programmes which have been accredited and operate in Master’s Degree awarding institutions which have been purposely accredited. During the 2006/2007 academic year, universities which run accredited Licence Degree study programmes may apply to RAQAHE

and submit the corresponding self-evaluation reports in order to be accredited as Master's Degree awarding institutions.

Master's Degree study programmes are organized in the following fundamental fields: Exact Sciences, Natural Sciences, Humanities, Theology, Law, Social and Political Sciences, Economic Sciences, Architecture and Urbanism, Agriculture and Forestry, Medical Sciences, Engineering, Military and Intelligence Sciences, Arts. Each field can cover a number of specializations or Master's programmes. At the same time, Master's disciplinary or interdisciplinary programmes may be organized. The profile of a Master's Degree programme can be one of research, in the sense of thoroughly studying a disciplinary scientific field; of complementarity, in the sense of interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary studying of a scientific field; or of professionalization, in the sense of acquiring professional competences in a specialized field.

In view of accrediting a higher education institution which offers Master's Degree programmes, the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators presented in Part II of this **Methodology** must be applied. These are particularized in the self-evaluation report for each field of specialization, and, within the latter, for each Master's programme. In the external evaluation made in view of accreditation, there are also applied the provisions of the *Government's Decision no. 404/2006 with regard to the organization and implementation of Master's Degree studies* to which the following requirements must be added:

- 1) Only higher education institutions accredited within the accredited licence domain have the right to organize Master study cycles;
- 2) The standards required for accrediting programmes of the Licence study cycle must be also considered in the accreditation of programmes of the Master study cycle together with the following requirements:
 - a) for the accreditation of a Master study programme, the applicant must prove that:
 - the stated teaching and research mission is justified by elements of relevance and opportunity in accordance with the national qualifications framework and the requirements of the labour market, and addresses teaching and research objectives;

- the stated teaching and research mission corresponds to the profile and specialization of the awarding higher education institution;
- b) for the accreditation of a Master study programme all teaching positions created in conformity with the current legal provisions will be covered with teaching staff tenured in higher education, according to the Law, with the following academic ranks: university professor, associate professor or senior lecturer holding a PhD title in the field of the occupied position, out of which at least 80% are employed on the basis of an institutionally defined teaching load. The rest of the education activities (seminars, applications, projects, etc.) can be covered by other teaching staff, tenured in higher education, holding a PhD in the speciality of the disciplines covered by the teaching position they are occupying, employed on the basis of an institutionally defined teaching load in the respective institution;
- c) the higher education institution has its own adequately equipped research laboratories in the field of the Master study programme for which the accreditation is solicited.

In view of accrediting a Master study programme, all requirements provided by the present **Methodology** must be fulfilled and confirmed by justifying documents elaborated by the higher education institution which applies for accreditation.

4.5. Accreditation of Doctoral Degree awarding institutions (DDAI)

In the 2006/2007 academic year, the existing doctoral programmes are carried out until they are completed. In the 2007/2008 academic year, there will be operating and entrance examinations will be organized only for accredited Doctoral programmes offered by institutions accredited in this respect. During the 2006/2007 academic year, RAQAHE in collaboration with the *National Council for the Attestation of University Titles, Diplomas, and Certificates* proceeds to the accreditation of the DDAI and of the Doctoral study programmes based on the provisions of this **Methodology**, especially those presented in Part II of the **Methodology**, and of the *Government's Decision no. 567/2005 with regard to the Organization and Implementation of Doctoral Study Programmes*. The accreditation of DDAI is made by fields and by Doctoral study programmes.

Final Considerations

The **Methodology** will be applied starting with the 2006/2007 academic year. Based on the provisions of the **Methodology**, the RAQAHE Council will accomplish, by 30 September 2007, the following objectives:

1. apply the **Methodology** in order to resolve the applications for provisional authorisation to operate and accreditation of Licence, Master, and Doctoral study programmes;
2. apply the **Methodology**, on a trial basis, at accredited universities which volunteer for piloting; during the trial period, the following objectives will be accomplished:
 - a) test the relationships between areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators;
 - b) define the variation limits of indicators from the minimum level to the highest possible optional level of reference;
 - c) elaborate and validate self-evaluation user's guides as well as the user's guides for external evaluation and quality assurance;
3. elaborate a report with regard to the status of higher education quality and a set of recommendations for quality improvement;
4. formulate, together with NCHEF and NCRHE, and submit to the Ministry of Education and Research a set of proposals with regard to the optimal relationship between the institutional state of quality and the public financing.

**Number of study programs evaluated by ARACIS
until February 26, 2013**

Licenta (bachelor study programs) Provisional authorization – IF (full-time)		Licenta (bachelor study programs) Accreditation – IF (full-time)		Licenta (bachelor study programs) Periodic evaluation – IF (full-time)			Master programs Accreditation – IF (full-time)	
Auth.	Non-auth. (Auth. denied)	Acr.	Non-acr.	Maintaining acr.	Withdrawal of acr.	Acr.	Non-acr. (Acr. denied)	
94	13	92	2	74	-	461	21	
2007 - Total = 107		2007 - Total = 94		2007 - Total = 74			2007 - Total = 482	
94	19	97	3	99	-	926	31	
2008 - Total = 113		2008 - Total = 100		2008 - Total = 99			2008 - Total = 957	
99	20	147	13	250	-	550	22	
2009 - Total = 119		2009 - Total = 160		2009 - Total = 250			2009 - Total = 572	
83	17	167	15	161	3	202	16	
2010 - Total = 100		2010 - Total = 182		2010 - Total = 164			2010 - Total = 218	
80	13	149	15	150	3	530	23	
2011 - Total = 93		2011 - Total = 164		2011 - Total = 153			2011 - Total = 553	
53	3	102	13	155	3	27	3	
2012 - Total = 56		2012 - Total = 115		2012 - Total = 158			2012 - Total = 30	
588		815		898			2812	

Licenta (bachelor study programs) Provisional authorization – ID (distance learning)	Licenta (bachelor study programs) Accreditation - ID (distance learning)		Licenta (bachelor study programs) Periodic evaluation - ID (distance learning)		Master programs Accreditation - ID (distance learning)			
	Auth.	Non-auth. (Auth. denied)	Acr.	Non-acr.	Maintaining acr.	Withdrawal of acr.	Acr.	Non-acr. (Acr. denied)
4	4	1	1	-	-	-	1	3
2007 - Total = 8		2007 - Total = 1			2007 - Total = -		2007 - Total = 4	
11	1	13	-	-	-	-	27	3
2008 - Total = 12		2008 - Total = 13			2008 - Total = -		2008 - Total = 30	
8	1	50	-	-	-	-	55	2
2009 - Total = 9		2009 - Total = 50			2009 - Total = -		2009 - Total = 57	
27	1	39	-	-	-	-	12	2
2010 - Total = 28		2010 - Total = 39			2010 - Total = -		2010 - Total = 14	
10	5	60	-	-	1	-	-	-
2011 - Total = 15		2011 - Total = 60			2011 - Total = 1		2011 - Total = -	
8	-	25	1	3	-	-	-	-
2012 - Total = 8		2012 - Total = 26			2012 - Total = 3		2012 - Total = -	
80		189			4		105	

Licenta (bachelor study programs) Provisional authorization – IFR (part-time)		Licenta (bachelor study programs) Accreditation –IFR (part-time)		Licenta (bachelor study programs) Periodic evaluation – IFR (part-time)		Master programs Accreditation – IFR (part-time)	
Auth.	Non-auth. (Auth. denied)	Acr.	Non-acr.	Maintaining acr.	Withdrawal of acr.	Acr.	Non-acr. (Acr. denied)
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2007 - Total = -	2007 - Total = -	2007 - Total = -	2007 - Total = -	2007 - Total = -	2007 - Total = -	2007 - Total = -	2007 - Total = -
8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2008 - Total = 8	2008 - Total = 8	2008 - Total = -	2008 - Total = -	2008 - Total = -	2008 - Total = -	2008 - Total = -	2008 - Total = -
1	-	9	-	-	-	3	3
2009 - Total = 1	2009 - Total = 1	2009 - Total = 9	2009 - Total = 9	2009 - Total = -	2009 - Total = -	2009 - Total = 6	2009 - Total = 6
20	-	11	-	-	-	-	-
2010 - Total = 20	2010 - Total = 20	2010 - Total = 11	2010 - Total = 11	2010 - Total = -	2010 - Total = -	2010 - Total = -	2010 - Total = -
7	-	41	2	-	-	74	-
2011 - Total = 7	2011 - Total = 7	2011 - Total = 43	2011 - Total = 43	2011 - Total = -	2011 - Total = -	2011 - Total = 74	2011 - Total = 74
6	-	45	1	-	-	-	-
2012 - Total = 6	2012 - Total = 6	2012 - Total = 46	2012 - Total = 46	2012 - Total = -	2012 - Total = -	2012 - Total = -	2012 - Total = -
42	42	109	109	-	-	80	80

Total Licență (bachelor study programs) = 2725

Total Master study programs = 2997

<u>Academic quality external evaluation of accredited higher education institution = 95</u>	<i>For 85 universities</i>
<u>Institutional accreditation = 3</u>	

Total Licență (bachelor study programs) = 506

Total Master study programs = 64

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Introduction

This report:

1. Is about the **academic quality and quality assurance mechanisms** of higher education (HE), namely the relations between HE system objectives, academic activities and their corresponding results;
2. Proposes **an analysis of the state of quality** (ergo: not an analysis of its dynamics) in the higher education as a system¹, so that any reference to the HE institutions or to their relations are merely implicit;
3. Is based on **subjective data**, i.e. on statistical distributions of perceptions, opinions, beliefs and representations of students, academic staff and employers about the system's activities and results, as well as on **objective data and information** about system inputs, processes and outputs;
4. Makes **comparisons** between data and information about the Romanian HE system and other European higher education systems;
5. Identifies **achievements and performances**, but also issues and critical concerns, all in order to open informed discussions on the future dynamics of higher education system and of its institutions, in a framework which is and aims to be as much European as possible.

This report proposes a **contextual framework** for further analysis and discussion. It intends to remain open to interpretation and in particular to generate new information and data to ground further rigorous arguments. For instance, next year we will focus on an institutional approach and on a new set of data and information in order to later have available longitudinal analyses, all associated to benchmarking procedures. Gradually, the references to contextualization will not only be national and static, but increasingly dynamic and explicitly European.

So far, this analysis and its public discussion are still fragile, especially since we can hardly meet a person not making assessments, be they informal, about the quality of higher education or of a university or a study program. Such assessments are often categorical and clear-cut, as if they were based on numerous local and international experiences and on the most objective information. Moreover, the meanings associated with academic quality are as numerous, as contextualized. Such impressionistic reference to academic quality in Romanian higher education has to be abandoned. One of the objectives of our report is to provide grounds to build a gradually emerging **analytical framework**, to identify a common **context of reference** and provide a clear, distinct and carefully documented image of the **academic quality** in our higher education.

¹ The word „system”, we use in association with „higher education” in this report, should be considered restrictively. It is no more than a way to refer to the higher education sector as a whole, and it is not intended to promote a „systemic” understanding of the education sector.

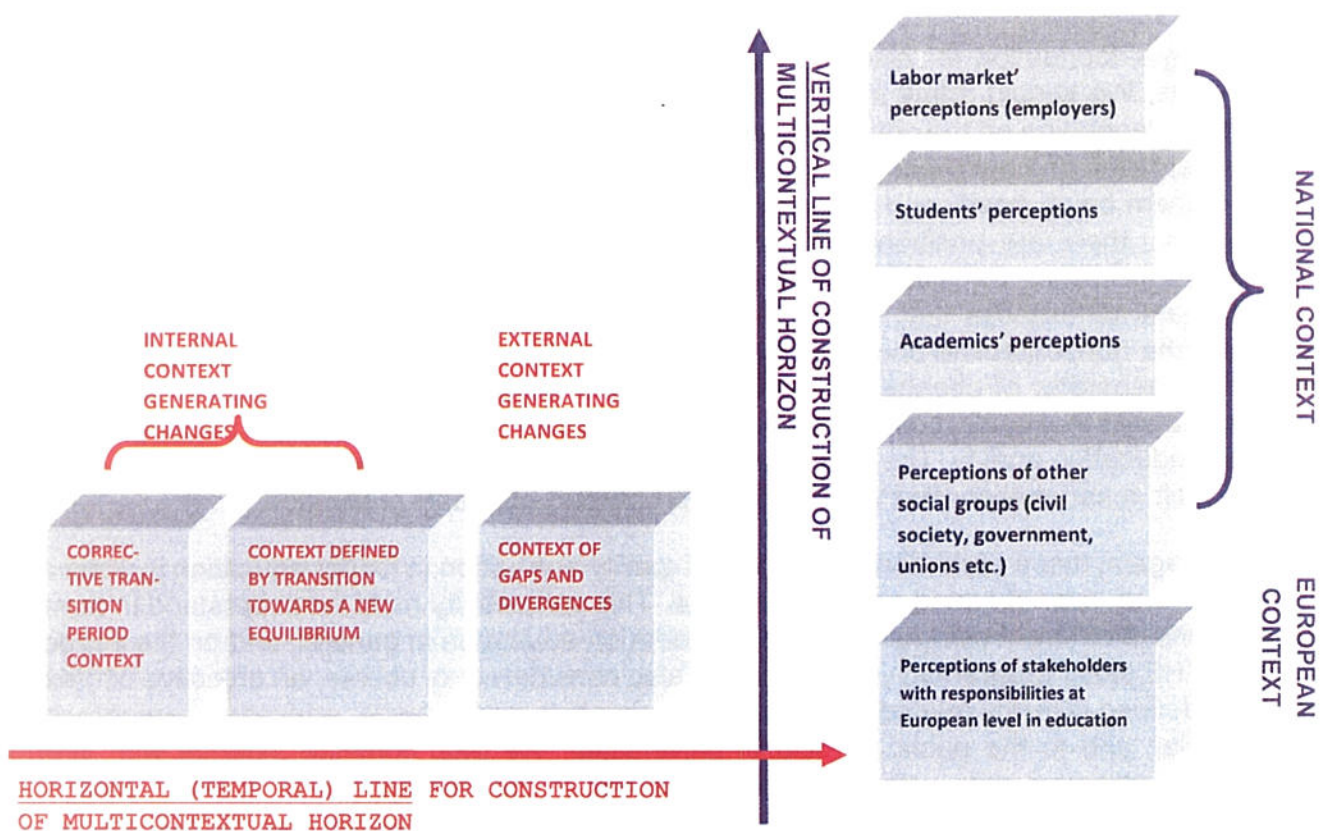
1. Quality Evaluation: A Contextual Approach

In building a foundation for discussions about academic quality, we start by considering a set of contexts. We should admit from the outset that there are multiple perspectives on academic quality, all depending on the contexts taken as a reference. For illustration, we propose in Figure 1 a representation of a multi-horizon context, which shows the key evaluation contexts considered, each of them being positioned along two lines of construction. On the horizontal line, with time references, there are positioned the three periods higher education went through after 1990 (corrective transition, transition towards a new equilibrium and the current period characterized by gaps and differences that demand for specific system adjustments and convergences). In addition, the horizontal line shows the transition from the internal to that external context which is the key generator of changes. On the vertical line, there are positioned sets of perceptions/representations that correspond to the five main categories of stakeholders, particularly interested in higher education quality. The vertical line shows also that at least two types of macro-contexts can be built: a national context² and a European context of quality evaluation.

Let's say, again, that a multi-horizon context of quality evaluation in higher education is, after all, a subjective one, even if based on objective data. This subjectivity must be understood in terms of perceptions of different categories of stakeholders on education in general, and on the academic quality of HE study programs in particular. We also considered, of course, an objective contextual horizon, defined in terms related to general demographics and to higher education demographics, in particular, and to the public funding of universities. We also combine external with internal references, objective data with subjective variations in the perceptions of different categories of persons interested or directly involved in higher education. However, we do not plan in the future to combine a static analysis of academic quality with any macro-analysis of the society in which higher education operates. We leave to others such ambitions, and we limit ourselves to highlighting the subjective or objective attributes of the academic quality in the Romanian HE system, which could contribute to the development and improvement of a genuine *quality culture*.

2 The context concept here concerns institutional objective arrangements which may contribute to the construction of the subjective perceptions of stakeholders with regard to the quality dimension of higher education.

Figure 1: Multicontextual horizon of quality evaluation in higher education



2. A Synthetic Image: Indicators and Scores at a Glance

Let us first make a synthetic presentation of the state of HE quality. The indicators selected to do so are presented below, together with their associated scores. The indicators are measured on a simple ordinal scale, each associated with three score levels: positive status ("green card"), moderate status ("yellow card") and negative status ("red card"). The association of scores to each of the proposed indicators is supported by the quantitative and qualitative data detailed in the report.

The first set of indicators (S1.2 – S1.10) is conceived in the context of Romania's participation in the Bologna Process. The selected indicators in this set correspond to the major objectives of the Bologna Process: organization of university studies in three cycles, recognition of diplomas, European student mobility etc. The second set of indicators (S2.1 – S2.10) regards the context resulting from the external (i.e.: extra-institutional) messages of the bodies involved in academic quality assurance. The indicators selected in this set are mostly about the relations between

students and their studies and about the perceived quality of HEIs educational offers. The third set of indicators (S3.1 – S3.23) regards various institutional aspects of the academic world, as perceived by employers, students and academics.

Set 2 of indicators measuring the status of higher education quality in terms of external quality assurance system (developed by ARACIS)

Code	Indicator Definition	Type
S2.1	Quality of Romanian universities measured by study destinations of foreign European students	Feedback
S2.2	Transparency of university education offers to students	Input
S2.3	Ratio between number of students and number of academic staff	Input
S2.4	Ratio between the number of students enrolled in the system and the number of graduates	Output/ outcome
S2.5	Participation in lifelong learning programs	Input
S2.6	Development of functional information systems for the collection, processing and reporting of quality assurance data at university level	Feedback
S2.7	Develop in universities student carrier and labor market guidance and counseling systems	Process
S2.8	University scientific research	Output/ outcome
S2.9	Operation of central university commissions for quality assessment and assurance	Feedback
S2.10	Acquire equipment for laboratories and classrooms	Input

Set 3 of indicators measuring the status of higher education quality in terms of main stakeholders perceptions (employers, faculty, students)

Code	Indicator Definition	Type
S3.1	Number of students continuing their studies in the university next cycle	Input
S3.3	Quality of organization of the learning process (academic staff perception)	Process
S3.4	Content quality of learning process (academic staff perception)	Process
S3.5	Academic staff perception regarding the existence of resources necessary in the learning process	Input
S3.6	Academic staff perception on the extent to which the faculty where they are teaching helps students to acquire the skills and competences they need to work	Output/ outcome
S3.7	Students perception on the extent to which the faculty where they study contributes to training graduates for the labor market	Output/ outcome
S3.8	Quality of learning process organization (student perception)	Process
S3.9	Quality of learning process content (student perception)	Process
S3.10	Quality of academic staff (student perception)	Input
S3.11	Existence of resources that students need in the learning process (student perception)	Input

S3.12	Student perception on the existence of available instruments in the academic departments in which they are studying to guide and prepare them for the labor market	Output/ outcome
S3.13	Student perception on the chances they have on the labor market as higher education graduates	Output/ outcome
S3.15	Quality level of university studies (employers perception)	Output/ outcome
S3.16	Student perception on the quality of the contribution of their academic department to the skills and competencies they need to work	Output/ outcome
S3.17	Student perception of the usefulness of their university degrees on the labor market	Output/ outcome
S3.18	Student perception of the degree of corruption in the faculty and university where they are studying	Process
S3.19	Student perception on the operation of the institutional communication channels in their faculties	Feedback
S3.20	Degree of implementation of course evaluation by students, according to academic staff	Feedback
S3.21	The degree of correlation between the qualities defined by the academic staff as important for employment and the skills defined by employers as important	Output/ outcome
S3.22	Student perception regarding the extent of corruption in the Romanian universities	Process
S3.23	Quality of education in the context of the Bologna system implementation (employers perception)	Input

Of the 40 selected indicators³, 11 have obtained the “green” value, 14 the “red” value, and 15 the “yellow” value. Therefore, pushing ahead things, we may say that the quality of the Romanian higher education can be assessed as contextually and predominantly “moderate”. However, such statement may be regarded as superficial, given the fact that the indicators which may seem really important in the current trends related to the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda (the contribution of higher education to increased employability and economic development) were assessed as “red”. In other words, quality dimensions such as the relationship between the labor market and the Romanian universities, and the content of the educational process have a “negative” score. As these indicators regard HE **results**, the conclusion may be rather alarming: ***unless introducing significant and rapid corrections in the HE system and in its universities, we risk having less efficient universities, more and more diplomas, less individual professional skills, and finally, a chronic lack of European competitiveness.***

These statement should, however, be considered with caution, given both the national socio-economic developments and those of the European Union, as well as the developments of the Bologna Process in the 46 participating countries. At the moment, we must accept an undeniable reality: the Lisbon Agenda’s overall goals are not to be reached by 2010, and the Bologna Process is entering in 2010 in its second phase. Accordingly, the projections for higher education

3 The indicators presented in the three sets came out of a selection made among a much broader range of indicators. This is why the indicators are not given consecutive numbers.

cannot be of a deterministic type. For example, we can not yet offer documented answers to the question “what do economy and society expect from universities and their graduates?” The answer would probably have several known components, such as: “graduates to become good citizens in democratic societies, to develop their personality, to learn and master foreign languages, to master computing and communication techniques etc.”; but the answer may also have insufficiently grounded components, regarding issues like: “which economic areas need us to prepare graduates for in terms of their individual professional skills and how will the demand for such graduates evolve over time on the labor market; what is the labor market we refer to in Romania in the context of globalization; which are those areas in which research should be stimulated in conjunction with social and economic demand etc.” Unfortunately, remedial actions taken at the university level, in the absence of answers to such questions, would significantly disrupt an already disturbed system, without solving anything! The most striking example is in the health field, where Romanian recently graduating doctors and nurses find easily work in countries like France, Italy, etc. This situation is seen in Romania as exclusively due to the State’s incapacity to providing them with jobs leading to material and professional satisfaction, and not as a proof that the medical staffing issue was not actually resolved. The situation in France, Italy or Portugal is different, as for instance in Portugal the rural areas are largely covered with naturalized Brazilian doctors.

Let’s refer from another perspective to the three sets of indicators, as outlined above. They can be organized, in terms of their institutional relevance, in three categories: inputs, processes and results. Following such reading, the academic quality of university programs can be summarized as follows:

Quality Indicators Matrix⁴

S3.1						S3.20	S3.21	
S1.2						S3.19	S2.9	
S1.3	S3.10					S3.16	S2.6	
S1.4	S1.7	S2.2				S3.12	S1.9	
S1.5	S1.8	S2.3	S3.3	S3.8	S2.7	S3.13	S2.1	
S1.6	S2.10	S2.5	S3.4	S3.9	S1.10	S3.15	S2.4	
S3.5	S3.11	S3.23	S3.7	S3.18	S3.22	S3.6	S3.17	S2.8
INPUT INDICATORS			PROCESS INDICATORS			OUTPUT/ OUTCOME AND FEEDBACK INDICATORS		
Positive status of the quality indicator Moderate status of the quality indicator Negative status of the quality indicator								

⁴ The function of this matrix is descriptive, in that it shows the distribution of indicators in the three categories of quality status: positive, negative and moderate. In other words, it is an alternative way to re-sume/to re-think the three sets of indicators presented earlier in a matrix type sequence.

The quality indicators which have most often obtained a "positive value" (green) are those of an input type (entries into the system). This indicates a **general concern that regards the higher education system's capacity of meeting certain quality values: it is better suited to face inputs demands and less so in meeting outcomes demands**. The quality of higher education, in terms of results, seems to be rather poor: out of the 15 outcome type indicators, 7 take negative values, 7 take a moderate value, and only one takes a positive value. It seems that we are still mostly concerned with input values in the system, but without targeting effective and well defined results.

There is at least one explanation to ground this general concern, still mostly focused on satisfying input values indicators. It is an institutional explanation stating that the earlier assessment methodologies, established in the 1990s by the former quality and accreditation agency (CNEAA), saw quality in relation to the institutional compliance with some rules which first of all required the achievement of certain entry requirements (student admission to study programs; ratio between the number of students and the number of teachers; availability of certain material resources etc.). The inertia regarding the academic quality evaluation, derived from the past methodology, is still present today. This particular form of quality understanding and evaluation (which mainly values the matching with input indicators) diverges from the form of understanding and assessing academic quality in terms of learning and institutional outcomes, already existing in the present ARACIS methodology and dominant in the ENQA and EQAR systems: the quality of higher education is considered in particular against the degree of achievement of output indicators. Achieving the minimum performance level indicators of inputs is only one condition, necessary and assumed from the beginning⁵, as it is, but far from being sufficient.

After this summary, let us further proceed to a detailed presentation.

3. The Bologna Process

At the European level, in the context of the Bologna Process implementation, Romanian higher education has positive feedbacks and a good image. According to the Bologna Process Stocktaking Report (prepared for the Ministerial Conference in Leuven, 2009), our country has achieved a grade of "excellent performance" for 8 out of the 12 indicators measuring the degree of implementation of the Bologna Process.⁶ Among the quality indicators with the most

⁵ For instance, in Great Britain, the input indicators are organized in a set of benchmarks known as Academic Infrastructure. Any higher education institution in the UK (England, Northern Ireland and Wales) must meet the requirements of Academic Infrastructure in order to get the institutional accreditation. Therefore, meeting the reference points on the conduct of study programs does not mean any particular level of quality, but rather the compliance to a minimum level of conditions without which the education process cannot take place.

⁶ The 8 indicators relate to: the degree of implementation of the first and the second university cycles; the degree of participation of students in the two cycle university system; the degree of access to cycle II of university studies; the degree of development of an external quality assurance system; the degree of student participation in the quality assurance process; the degree of national implementation of European standards of quality corresponding to EHEA; the degree of implementation of the Diploma Supplement; the

frequent positive status are those referring to the steps taken by Romania in the field of quality assurance in higher education. **Thus, were highly appreciated both the international external evaluations of ARACIS, and the fact the Romanian agency obtained full membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and particularly in the exclusive European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).**

The image of Romania at the European level in terms of formal implementation of the Bologna Principles is not, however, exclusively positive. In this regard, one weakness is represented by **the delays in the implementation of the national qualifications framework in higher education.** However, we should keep in mind that this issue is not only Romania's; it is somewhat general in Europe. Furthermore, upon the proposal of the Council of Europe through CDESR – the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research⁷, the deadline for approval (self-certification) of the national qualifications framework has been extended until 2012 in most of the 46 countries of the Bologna Process.

In general, the current positive information in the European context on the implementation of the Bologna Process in Romania should be treated restrictively and each time on comparative basis. Progress in the implementation of the Bologna Process is not an exclusive feature of Romania, but rather a general dominant feature of the national systems integrated in the process⁸.

As regards the **higher education future challenges that Romania will manage from a national and especially European perspective**, we should mention: the completion of the National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education; the external evaluation of all higher education institutions in accordance with European quality standards; improved access to education for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups (poor, rural); increased European competitiveness of Romanian universities and more foreign students from the European and international areas.

4. Academic Statistics

4.1. Demographics and academic flows

The Romanian universities not only are not listed among the best higher education institutions in the European or global ratings, but they are also missing from the top 5 study destinations for students of any European country. An exception is the Republic of Moldova, understandable situation, given the Romanian policy of providing special study places for Moldovan citizens. **The figures on foreign students choosing the Romanian higher education system is still low compared with European countries** - in such hierarchy, Romania stands on a backward position. This makes us ask question both the competitiveness and openness of Romanian universities to the European area of education and their ability to create / provide the conditions needed to host foreign students; all in circumstances of higher education under-

degree of implementation of the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of diplomas and certificates obtained in higher education in European countries. Also, Romania has made significant progress as regards the degree of international participation in quality assurance and implementation of ECTS.

7 Coordinates the national qualification framework in higher education.

8 See European University Association, Trends V, 2007.

funding from public funds.

The number of foreign students who choose the Romanian higher education system is still low compared to the European countries - in such hierarchy, Romania stands on a low position. This makes us ask question both the competitiveness and the openness of Romanian universities to the European area of education, and their ability to create/provide the conditions needed to host foreign students, all in terms of higher education under-funding from public funds.

Romania and Bulgaria have the lowest rates of participation in training programs and professional development of employees among all European countries (1.3% versus 29.2% - Denmark, the highest value recorded in Europe). This is hardly encouraging, given that for Romania, the level of professional employability of the population from 15 to 64 years old was 59% in 2008, compared to the EU27 average of 65.9%.

As regards the quality assurance mechanisms, **there is a gap between the national external system of quality assurance, positively evaluated at the European level, and the universities' capacity to implement mechanisms of quality assurance and improvement.** Many of the Romanian universities do not have active committees of internal quality assurance, and they have difficulties in providing data and information for quality certification, including those required by ARACIS on quality assurance. Our universities suffer from a chronic lack of functional data collection, processing and reporting systems regarding the flows of students and their activities.

The guidance systems for student career and employment on the labor market are still very poorly developed in universities, despite the fact that the academic staff assumes the social function of training graduates for employment.

Romania follows the aging and population decline global trends reported in Europe and worldwide. Against this background, the role of higher education is crucial in enhancing employability on the labor market, not only for youth, but also for adults.

Beside the overall diminution of the Romanian school population, **higher education has undergone an intense massification process after 1990.** Thus, for example, in just 10 years, from 1998 to 2007, the population of students has increased almost 3 times. This extremely fast increase of student population has at least two characteristics:

1. **the massification process has not been correlated with a proportional increase in resources** (under-funded system);
2. **the massification process has not been uniform in the study fields:** some fields had an inflation of candidates, while others faced depopulation.

These two features of the massification process generated a number of contradictory effects on the system.

First, there was an overall **gap between the number of students and the number of academic staff.** The increase in the number of students was much faster than the increase in the number of teachers. This made the ratio between the number of students and the number of teachers increase from 13.8/1 in 1990/1991 to 25.7 /1 in 2006/2007. In other words, in 16 years, the average number of students per teacher almost doubled.

This figure refers to the average. In some universities and study programs, the ratio is well above it, such as 320/1.

Secondly, universities have developed at least two types of behavior. Some chose massification because of under-funding, to cover their costs by **attracting more students paying fees** (well above the 2007 average of 25.7 students per teacher). Some faculties which experienced depopulation have chosen, mainly because of underfunding, to **apply for research grants**. Of the two described behaviors, it appears that the dominant one is attracting fee-paying students.

Thirdly, because of depopulation, the majority of universities chose to relax the admission conditions for candidates in order to fill the places brought to competition.

The higher education system is characterized by a **gap growing every year between the number of students enrolled in the system and the number of graduates**. For instance, while in 1990/1991 there were 25,927 graduates out of 192,810 students enrolled; in 2005/2006, there were 112,244 graduates out of 716,464 enrolled students. This annually increasing gap can be interpreted following two directions. First, it can be argued it has significant negative effects: ineffective use of resources; increase of the study period; increase of dropout trend. In other words, the result can be seen in a black light: the resources allocated to train a graduated are increasing accordingly. Moreover, it can be argued that this gap indicates other things. For instance, many students choose to work during their studies, which cause them to lack time to achieve their studies. Beyond these interpretations, one thing is certain: careful monitoring and accurate data are necessary on the causes leading to this gap between the number of students enrolled in the system and the number of graduates.

As regards the organization forms of higher education, **distance learning has been following in recent years a trend of accelerated growth**. For instance, if in 1999/2000 only 2% of the student population used this form of education, in 2006/2007, the percentage grew to 23%. It means an almost 12 times increase in just 6 years. The consequence of this development is that distance learning must become a reference focus of academic quality assurance, as long as the practice of academic and professional diploma equivalence for day courses, and part-time courses and distance learning are maintained. The academic and professional equivalence should be associated with equivalent quality standards.

The expansion of education organized in forms other than day courses is supported by figures regarding the ratio between the number of students and the number of academic staff. For example, in 2006, the ratio of full-time students per teacher was 17.6 /1, and the ratio of part-time students per teacher was 8.1/1. Therefore, more than one third of the students per teacher came from education forms other than day courses (distance learning was predominant). The consequence is that the teaching types are diverse and ever more demanding, which equals to **an increase of time spent teaching/assisting to the detriment of other activities such as research**. Under such conditions, an important component of the university mission, and thus of academic quality in higher education, is inevitably adversely affected.

4.2. Public Funding

The CNFIS figures show **a higher education characterized by public under-funding**. In this context, public universities only partially cover their current expenditures for basic activities through

budget allocations (for example, in 2005, the baseline funding covered 80% of staff and 20% of material costs and services⁹). The deficit caused by the insufficient budgetary allocation was covered by the public universities out of their own incomes, particularly through the dual system of free and paid education. In other words, in this context, the private fees collected from paying students, contributed to reducing the effects of underfunding in public higher education. Increasing the number of paying students - as a way of covering the **gap between the universities needs and the insufficient budgetary allocations**, was associated with an increased ratio of personnel expenses, and a decrease in the share of material costs, in absolute value, in the overall basic activity expenditures. In other words, universities tend to increase expenditures on wages, some even the wage levels (considering the growing share of teaching activity, coupled with the growing number of paying students), and to reduce the material costs (including investment in materials¹⁰).

The annual reproduction of underfunding in higher education, despite the increase in absolute levels of the funds allocated to universities, has the following direct effects: deterioration of physical assets; low level of equipment of laboratories and classrooms; lack of specialized administrative structures to support university management; lack of information resources (libraries, in particular) or lack of additional resources required to ensure quality.

Given such underfunding, quality assurance in universities is under question. Maintaining high quality standards and implementing internal systems of quality evaluation and monitoring require additional financial efforts and public resources, in parallel with a diversification of funding sources, including private sources.

4.3. Research

Research seems unattractive for many universities also for financial reasons: the incomes generated by research do not supplement the budgetary allocations in the same manner as the fees paid by students, and have a lesser effect on the individual incomes of researchers.¹¹ For this reason, but also for others (such as, the research projects evaluation practices or the deficient institutional systemic management of research funds), just 6 accredited higher education institutions out of a total of 85¹² have obtained more than half of the public money allocated for research (51.14%), and 3 universities (i.e.: Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest Polytechnic University, University of Bucharest) have won almost one third of the funds (32.36%)¹³. In addition, about 20% of the Romanian universities have collected more than 90% of the research funds through competition. Another aspect is that of the top 20 universities that have obtained

9 "Continuing the expenditure analysis by types of basic activity, it was noted that budgetary funding covered 80% of the personnel costs in 2005, while these are otherwise covered out of their own incomes. Furthermore, only 20% of the material expenses and service costs were covered from the baseline funding in 2005, otherwise they were covered out of their own incomes." (CNFIS, 2007, p. 25)

10 According to CNFIS, 2007, Higher Education Funding in Romania, CNFIS View Point, pp. 25 – 26, available on www.cnfis.ro

11 See CNFIS, 2007, p. 26.

12 According to Gov. Decision no. 749/2009 for approval of Classification of fields and structures of higher education institutions and of their specialized/university study programs accredited or authorized to provisionally operate, published in the Romanian Official Gazette, Year 177 (XXI), no. 465, pp. 7 – 90, available on: http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/432/HG_749-2009.pdf

13 It is about the research funds granted through the programs PN II – HR and Ideas, RO4096 – components I & II, CNCSIS (2004 - 2008) & NOW Pilot Fellowship Program Romania grants.

research funds, only 7 have a general profile, while the remaining 13 have a specialized profile (techniques, agricultural science, veterinary medicine, medicine and pharmacy, and economics).

While 90% of the public money allocated to research goes to 21 accredited higher education institutions, from a total of 85¹⁴ in our system, we may wonder to what extent the research activities¹⁵ still constitute a challenge for all the higher education institutions which argue, without exception, to be Humboldtian universities, with education and research activities.

The hierarchy of universities on the basis of the research funds received is associated with the distribution of the number of articles indexed in international databases. Thus, 16 universities that are among the top 20, according to the number of ISI¹⁶ indexed articles criterion, are also among the top 20 universities as regards the obtained research funds. And the top 3 universities that have obtained the largest research funds also stand in the top 3 for ISI indexed articles, with a total of 38% of the articles. ISI publication activities revolve around a small group of universities: 5 universities provide over 50% of the total number of ISI indexed articles. Moreover, only 20 universities provide over 90% of the ISI indexed articles.

The lack of research incentives and the under-funding of public education programs have trapped universities in logic ***of survival in which emphasis is rather laid on the communication of knowledge*** - teaching, than the production of knowledge - research. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that if no answer is provided to questions like: for whom and for what is research carried out, who commands it, which pays and who uses it, beyond the number of published articles, the mentioned negative effects will get worse. According to some academics, the grouping of the research projects and funds between a relatively small numbers of universities is also a consequence of the uncertainties associated with the social standing of university research, and also of the fact that the universities with good performance in scientific research are published in journals with visibility. The concentration trend will be maintained if research will continue to be seriously underfunded, also due to the lack of interest of the private sector – a general European characteristic, which is aggravated in Romania by a systematic destruction of

14 It is about the total number of state and private accredited HEIs.

15 Thus, we operate at the text level by allowing equivalence between carrying out research and access research grants. Categorically, the fact that universities apply for research grants is an indication of their intention to carry out research. Obviously this is not the only indicator measuring the research activity taking place in a higher education institution. On the other hand, however, this is the only indicator that we could measure to make system/generalized/normalized comparisons. Therefore, we assume this limit of data presentation in the report. And, we also point out that the references we make to the research activity of universities should only be seen from the perspective of their access on competitive basis to the research grants allocated through the above mentioned research programs.

16 The number of ISI indexed articles, considered as a criterion to measure scientific research (see also centralization of ISI indexed articles and methodology of building university hierarchies following this criterion - www.ad-astra.ro) is, in some often mentioned ways, questionable. However, in the absence of other forms of centralization of the scientific contributions of the academic staff in professional, national and international journals, this indicator is used with at least two meanings. First, as a form of comparison between the number of research grants obtained and the number of scientific articles published. Then as a way to indicate a university trend in this regard. In the future, to the extent to which we will also have available other data sources to allow a centralization of the articles published by the academic staff in international databases, we will use it as a complement to the hierarchy generated by the ISI indexed articles criterion.

the manufacturing industry after 1990.

Extending the implications, we can say that the lack of incentives to adopt practices to improve quality and the implementation of quality assurance procedures, makes *universities to have a rather reactive than proactive strategy in developing a culture of quality.*¹⁷

5. Distribution of Perceptions about Higher Education

5.1. Employers Perceptions¹⁸

According to employers, there are three main factors in the process of selection and employment of graduates: *the reputation of the university they graduated from* (which acts as an indicator of the potential knowledge of the graduate), *the employment history* (graduate's work experience, which should be specialized and Romanian) and the *candidate's capacity "to sell himself/herself" during the employment interview.*

The main aspects the employers are concerned about regarding a university graduate have little connection with his or her academic studies. In a hierarchy of "things" employers look for in a graduate, the first 4 positions are poorly connected with the academic characteristics: the graduate's ability to work in a team, to organize his or her work, his or her punctuality, morality and communication skills - with peers, superiors, customers, etc.

Of these, the first four aspects employers are most satisfied about (and therefore most interested in) as regards a new graduate are poorly connected with the university: computer skills, morality, punctuality and teamwork. The qualities and skills directly related to university studies rank lower in the employers' satisfaction. In addition, the dissatisfaction of employers about the aspects they consider important in a graduate's employment record is not significant. By default, we infer that employers are moderately satisfied with the new graduates they employ.

The employers' opinions on the value of the degrees are diverse: 40% consider that a BA is not a guarantee of quality graduates, while 36% think otherwise. In addition, *employers perceive the graduates as better trained in theory than in practice* (51% of employers believe that graduates have a good theoretical training in the field, and only 27% are convinced that graduates have a good practical training).

¹⁷ Here we consider that higher education institutions become interested in quality assurance practices only when confronted with the institutional/study programs accreditation process (reactive strategy).

¹⁸ In the data collection process the perceptions of employers from various fields were measured (industry, construction, services, trade), different types of companies (state owned, private Romanian, private foreign), different company sizes (under 10 employees, between 10 and 49 employees, between 50 and 249 employees, and over 250 employees).

More than half of employers (54%¹⁹) find *public universities better than the private ones*. Also, *most employers (42%) would prefer, under similar training, graduates of Romanian universities, rather than of universities from abroad*. And over 51% *would prefer graduates of the undergraduate courses of 4 (respectively 5 years), rather than graduates of the Bologna system*.

The employers' opinions on the responsibility of training graduates for employment are divided: 33% believe that this responsibility belongs to universities, 33% believe that it belongs to the graduates, and 28% believe that it belongs to the companies employing them.

Over half of the employers (56%) believe that the academic knowledge of the newly employed university graduates must be supplemented. Therefore, they provide vocational training inside or outside the company.

5.2. Students Perceptions²⁰

The 4 most important factors *determining the student preference for a particular college are*: their interest in the field, their desire to acquire knowledge, to have high incomes, and the public prestige of a faculty.

The success in life is not determined either by academic studies, or by social recipes. Only 29% of students find to a large and very large extent, that to succeed in life one must complete university studies. This information is consistent with the more general social perception diminishing the importance of education in the social success equation. On the other hand, it is surprising that half of the surveyed students (50%) do not find social relationships to be a decisive criterion for success in life. This information contradicts a more general social perception according to which the use of social networks to access resources (acquaintances, friends etc.) is a key to success. This "surprise" can also be considered in relation to the success models offered by the media – and particularly by the television – which induce and strongly support this perception.²¹ Today, there are no extensive study to show how sustainable is the success in life and society of those without university education.²²

The general evaluations of the surveyed students regarding the quality of the faculty where they are studying are extremely positive. Thus, 24% of the respondents found that they are studying in a top faculty, and 62% find that they are studying in a good faculty.

The students opinions about the educational process are generally positive, where the 5 best appreciated aspects refer rather to structure and form, than to the courses content and to the work of the academic staff: the library and other services provided are of good quality; the courses, seminars and laboratories are not canceled without rescheduling; the student evaluation criteria are clear; and the changes in schedule are timely announced. Against this positive background,

19 The result does not imply in any way that the remaining 46% is an irrelevant percentage.

20 In the data collection process were measured the perceptions of students from both state and private educational institutions; from accredited and authorized study programs. The students included in the sample came from the following fields: science, engineering, social sciences, law, military science, humanities, economics, medicine and pharmacy, agronomy and veterinary medicine, arts, architecture and sports.

21 It should be mentioned that this is only one of the possible explanations to be considered.

22 We mention that a career track project for university graduates is under implementation by UE-FISCSU – CNFIS.

there still are some aspects with a consistent percentage of dissatisfaction: 27% of the students interviewed find that their teachers are not available for advice when needed, and 19% believe that the information and comments they receive from the academic staff and assistants are not very helpful.

Regarding the contribution of educational institutions to the integration of graduates in the labor market, students find that the faculties are concerned to offer them *scholarships* (69%) and *internships* (57%). Only 42% of the interviewed students claimed that their faculty *has invited employers to provide them information on the existing jobs* and only 39% mentioned their faculties organizing internship programs.

The students are rather optimistic in terms of finding employment upon completion of studies. Thus, 48% of the respondents believe they will not have problems in finding a job, and 45% believe that upon graduation they will be able to find the job they want. The students' optimism is based on their confidence in their faculty and in its educational offer. Thus, 50% of the respondents believe that their faculty provides "all abilities and skills they may need at their workplace" (vs. 40% who think the contrary), and 66% believe that internships are truly useful in their training. In addition, only 38% of the students believe that the university courses they attend do not address the practical problems they will face at work (compared with 50% who think the contrary).

Regarding the **usefulness of the educational offers**, 69% of the respondents believed that the faculty they are attending provide them with the necessary knowledge to become specialists in their study field, and 61% believe that faculty provides them with the necessary skills for understanding related fields. Interestingly, 41% of the students surveyed are much and very much convinced that **the training offered by the Romanian higher education is at least as good as the one offered in Western Europe**. However, this is not the dominant perception among the student sample, as there is an equal percentage, 41%, who believe the contrary. The students from state universities have better educational results, higher aspirations for future careers, and are more likely in the final years of study to be more critical to the quality of the academic programs they attend.

The responsibility of training for the labor market belongs, according to students, primarily to the faculty (42%), and then to the graduates (35%). Only 18% of the respondents find companies responsible for training graduates for their entry in the labor market.

In terms of skills and knowledge required to work, most students found that university studies contribute to form the abilities to synthesize the received information (71%), to think analytically (67%), to work as a team (65%), and an effective organizational capacity (64%). In other words, these are **the characteristics students believe are formed mainly within their university study program**.

The study degree is highly valued by the students included in the sample: 69% find that the degree they will obtain is an indicator of the knowledge and skills acquired in college, while 57% much and very much believe that it will help them to easier obtain a job.

The continuation of studies through cycle II – Master's is a preference expressed by 88% of the students (75% Masters Degrees in Romania, and 13% abroad), while 43% of respondents are also considering attending doctoral studies.

Regarding corruption²³, 68% of the respondents believe it is much and very much spread in the private universities, and 60% in public universities. Only 25% of the students considered corruption to be much and very much spread in their faculty, and only 30% in the university in which they are studying. This data generates two implications: **a) private universities seem to be more corrupt, in general, than the public ones; b) the students are more virulent about other universities/faculties, than they are about their own university/ faculty.** However, we note that the answers are often not based on their own findings, but on "hearsay", and sometimes they are influenced by the way the questions are formulated.

5.3. Academic Staff Perceptions²⁴

The perceptions of the academic staff about the content and form of the educational process developed within their academic department are extremely positive. For instance, 91% of the academic staff find that the feedback provided helps students to better understand the field, 89% believe that students always receive feedback on their work, 89% believe that teachers are available for advice when students need it, 87% believe that courses intellectually stimulate students, etc.

Also, the academic staff perceptions about the organization of the educational process are equally positive. For example, the teachers find that: grading criteria are clear from the very beginning (94%); exam grades are always correct (94%); courses and labs are not canceled without rescheduling (92%) etc.

The same very positive perceptions persist regarding the resources needed in the educational process. The interviewed teachers find that students can access IT resources when needed (85%); library and its services are of good quality (82%); and that students may use specialized equipment when necessary (80%).

The evaluation of all courses by students is a procedure used on a small scale by the academic staff and their departments. Only 33% of the surveyed teachers said they ask their student for evaluations on all courses held and only 43% claim that in their academic department the assessment of all courses is mandatory. Slightly more than half of the surveyed teachers (52%) said that in their academic department the course evaluations made by students are used to a large and very large extent as criteria for designing programs and allocating courses to the faculty. The reverse consequence is that in the other cases, student evaluation is unnecessary. Student evaluation regarding the courses held by teachers is to a much lesser extent practiced in private universities.

In developing courses, the academic staff said they take into account the future qualification profile of the students (92%); obtaining good student learning results (91%); and student motivation to learn (88%). This information appears to be slightly contradictory, as Romania has experienced delays in the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education.

²³ The empirical investigation has not provided a definition of corruption and therefore what was measured was a vague concept with various meanings assumed by the respondent. Still, the meaning is generally negative.

²⁴ During the collection of data were measured the perceptions of the academic staff who worked in state and private higher education institutions, and in accredited or temporary authorized study programs. The fields of the sample academic staff were: science, engineering, social sciences, humanities, economics, medicine and pharmacy, agronomy and veterinary medicine, arts, architecture and sports.

The teacher perceptions of how the university educational process prepares and guides students for employment are extremely positive. The teachers believe that their academic department helps students to acquire the necessary skills and competences for work (90%); that internships during college are truly useful in training students (88%); that courses address practical problems that graduates may encounter in the workplace (68%); and that upon completion of studies the students will find it easier to find a job (67%).

7 out of 10 teachers much and very much believe that what is taught in their academic department and what is required at the workplace are similar things, and only 2 out of 10 teachers believe that the research publications are an important career aspect.

As regards the responsibility to prepare students for employment, 63% of the academic staff find it belongs to universities, 21% find it belongs to students, and only 10% believe that it belongs to the recruiter enterprises.

The degree students are conferred upon graduation is highly valued by the academic staff, as 84% of the latter find it is an indicator of the knowledge and skills that students obtain during their university years.

As regards the knowledge and skills generated by universities for the labor market, a hierarchy can be built based on the distribution of the teachers' responses, in which the first four positions are held by: the ability to synthesize the received information (80%), the analytical thinking (79%), the ability to use computer/new technology (79%), and the ability to convincingly argue a point of view (77%).

The dominant view among the academic staff is that the Romanian higher education is at least as good as that of Western Europe (59%).

6. Gaps and Differences in Education Quality

In assessing the status of higher education quality we found **differences in the intensity** and, sometimes, even **differences in the perceptions, representations and attitudes expressed by students, teachers and employers.** These differences and divergences are distributed on at least two levels.

A first step on which quality assessment gaps/differences stand is inter-contextual. As mentioned above, there is a difference between the positive image of higher education in the European context – the external context in terms of the Bologna Process, and the largely negative image generated by the data related to demographics, funding and research in higher education – the internal context. Here, the difference between the external context and the internal context is based on objective, system data.

A second step on which quality assessment gaps/differences stand is intra-contextual. It is about the divergences within the internal context, between the objective data of university statistics and the perceptions of the three groups directly concerned with higher education:

employers, students and academic staff. In other words, there is a discrepancy between the perceptions of different groups and how things objectively are. Moreover, even between the perceptions and attitudes of the three mentioned groups of stakeholders, gaps are identifiable in the representation of the condition of education.

We will not insist too much, as we did earlier, on the inter-contextual divergence. We recall, however, a decisive cleavage between the application of the formal/nominal Bologna Process principles, and the actual objective, statistic situation in education: ***Romania's progress is externally recognized in the implementation of specific indicators of the Bologna Process, but this progress, unfortunately, is not found in the university statistics and especially in the actual, substantial and institutional university practice. We tend as much as possible to export a positive image, but we are still striving in the interior to follow practices which do not fully meet this idyllic image. In other words, we have the appropriate university policies, but their implementation has not yet reached optimal parameters.***

We shall insist on the disparities and differences found in the intra-contextual step. As seen in the section for the submission of academic statistical data, the aspects related to higher education are rather negative, in terms of demography, education, and funding and research²⁵ (with some slightly positive accents). These negative aspects are opposed to the employers, teachers and students perceptions, which are predominantly positive after aggregation by group type. In other words, despite objective and comparative records, we tend to believe that the quality assessment of our higher education is good, worthy of our positive appreciation. Next, we will define the gaps/divergences of perception between employers, students and teachers. These gaps/divergences of perception are actually a variation of the positive content intensity, which decreases from the teachers, to the employers.

1. ***The gap in perception between the academic staff and the students on the content, the organization and the resources needed in the education process.*** Although both categories of stakeholders positively perceive the educational process, the weight of the positive²⁶ perceptions of the academic staff is higher than that of their students.

As regards the educational process content, the largest gap is found between the perceptions of the academic staff on the assignments/essays that students must complete. This gap²⁷ scores 40 (89% of the academic staff claim that students constantly receive feedback for their assignments/essays, while only 49% of students agree on this).

As regards the learning process organization, the largest gap is found between the perceptions regarding the fairness of the exam grades. This gap scores 51 (94% of the academic staff say exam grading is always correct, while only 43% of the students agree).

As regards the necessary learning resources, the largest gap is found in the perceptions on the availability of specialized equipment. This gap scores 37 (80% of the academic staff claim

25 A negative aspect of higher education seen through the education statistics, is the ratio number of students/per teacher, which has an annually increasing dynamics.

26 As perception frequency.

27 The gap represents the module difference between the two percentage values, measured for the same item, but in different groups. The gap variation occurs on a closed interval 0, 100, where 0 means the absence of any difference of perception (perfect convergence), and 100 means a total divergence of perception.

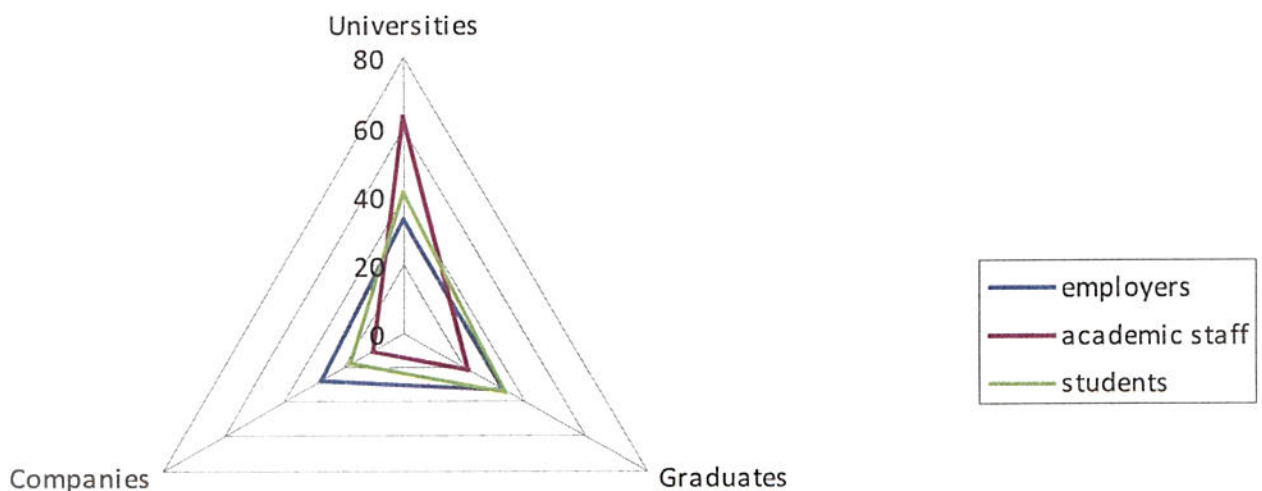
that the students can use specialized equipment when they need it, while only 43% of the latter agree) ²⁸.

2. **The gap between the academic staff and the students' perceptions on how the educational process prepares and guides graduates on the labor market.** As for the previous gap, the share of positive perceptions of the academic staff is higher than of the students'. ²⁹

For example, the largest gap is found in perceptions about the degree to which faculty helps students gain the skills and abilities they need to work. This gap scores 40 (90% of the academic staff think that faculty helps students gain the skills and abilities they need at their workplace, while only 50% of students agree with it).³⁰

3. **The gap between the perceptions of academic staff, students and employers regarding the responsibility to train graduates for the labor market (see Graph. 1.1.).**

Graph no. 1.1. Perception gaps regarding the responsibility to train graduates for the labor market



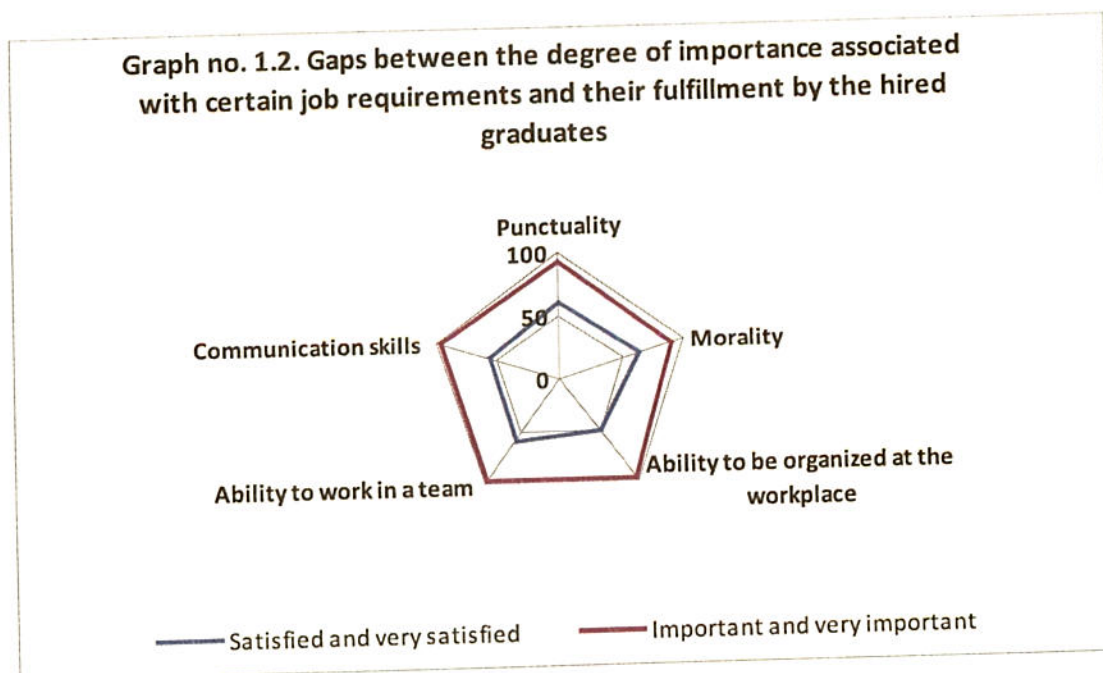
Analyzing the basic pairs, one may note that the larger perception gap is between the academic staff and the employers: 30 (63% of the academic staff believes that universities have the responsibility to train graduates for employment, while this opinion is supported by only 33% of the employers). Moreover, the highest gap in perception between academic staff and students is found for the same type of response: 22 (63% of the academic staff supports the responsibility of universities, compared to only 41% of the students).

28 The remaining gaps can be found in tables no. 6.1.#, 6.2.# si 6.3# of the Report.

29 Such gap is significant as we assume a student-focused learning process. Therefore, students' signals can represent a guide to the training and teaching conducted by the academic staff. As there are significant differences between the perceptions of academic staff and students on, for example, the usefulness of feedback provided by teachers in completing assignments, then we can assume the absence of communication between the two categories, and the existence of possible deficiencies in the educational process.

30 The remaining gaps can be found in Table no. 6.4.# of the Report.

4. **The gap between the perceptions of academic staff, students and employers about the study degree functions.** One significant gap in perception scored 15 and showed that 84% of the academic staff believed that a degree is an indicator of the knowledge and skills acquired by a student, while only 69% of the students share the same view. The difference in perceptions between the academic staff and the employers on the value of degrees is much higher: 44 (only 40% of the employers find the degree a guarantee of the graduate's training). Consequently, the degrees significance diminishes from academic staff to employers.
5. **Employers perception gap between the importance they associate with certain requirements and their satisfaction expressed over the way in which the hired graduates meet these requirements³¹.** As mentioned in the previous section (distribution of perceptions about higher education), there are a number of requirements that employers find very important in the selection and hiring process: ability to be organized at the workplace (97% -- important and very important), ability to work in a team (96%), communication skills (96%), punctuality (93%), and morality (90%). Although most employers are satisfied with how the graduates meet the requirements defined as important at work, however the level of satisfaction is much lower than the importance associated to it.



As per Graph. 1.2., the gaps in perception between what seems important to employers and the extent to which the hired graduates satisfy these requirements are significant. Thus, 97% of employers find the ability of employees to be organized at work as important and very important. But only 51% of the employers are satisfied and very satisfied with how the hired graduates meet this requirement. Therefore, in this case the distance is 46. Distances/gaps also exist for other requirements. For instance, punctuality - 93% important and very important, and only 61% satisfied and very satisfied, morality - 90% important and very important, and only 65% satisfied and very satisfied, ability to work in a team - 96% important and very important, and only 59% satisfied and very satisfied, communication skills - 96% important and very important, and only 58% satisfied and very satisfied.

6. *Perception gap between employers, students and academic staff on the graduate profile provided by universities*

One of the existing priorities at the European and national level is adapting higher education to the needs of the labor market. In this regard, the university graduates profile must approach as much as possible the one required by employers. The collected data rather seem to indicate a gap between the two profiles. Thus, the academic staff find that the top 5 knowledge and skills to which faculty training and teaching much and very much contribute are: the ability to synthesize the received information (80%), analytical thinking (79%), ability to use computer and new technologies (79%), ability to convincingly argue a point of view (77%) and ability to put into practice the acquired knowledge (75%). Moreover, according to employers, the top 5 knowledge and skills a graduate should have are: ability to be organized in the workplace (97%), ability to work in a team (96%), communication skills (with colleagues, superiors, customers etc.) (96%), punctuality (93%) and morality (90%). Although academic staff assumes the function of training graduates for employment, the proposed types of graduates do not match the ones employers want (in terms of the 5 most important knowledge and skills).

Analyzing the student perceptions about the knowledge and skills they are expected to acquire during their faculty years, we find that they partially overlap both with the mix of knowledge and skills mentioned by employers, and with the one proposed by the academics.

Table no. 1.1. Hierarchy of the most important knowledge and skills according to students

Top 5 hierarchy of knowledge and skills	Rank in the employers hierarchy	Rank in the academic staff hierarchy
1. Ability to synthesize received information (71%)	7	1
2. Analytical thinking (67%)	6	2
3. Ability to work in a team (65%)	1	6
4. Ability to be efficiently organized in the workplace (63%)	2	8
5. Critical thinking (63%)	10	10

Therefore, the graduate profile students expect to acquire for the labor market is a combination of the profile proposed by the academic staff and the graduate profile required by employers.

The presented data could lead us to invoke the extremely favorable perceptions of the academic staff on the study programs ability to provide graduates fit to the needs of the labor market. For example, 90% of the teachers and 50% of the students think that the faculty helps students to acquire the skills and competences they need to work.

7. *Difference of perceptions between employers, students and academic staff on the type of training graduates receive during their studies.* Only 27% of employers believe that the graduates have a good practical training in the field. This information diverges from teachers and students perceptions on the practical dimension of the courses and the university capacity to train for work. In this regard, the following figures are significant. **66%**

of the students considered that the practical component of the topics taught in courses is emphasized to a large and very large extent, and **68% of the academic staff** believe to a large and very large extent that university courses address the practical issues that graduates may face at work.

Although a large majority of academic staff assume the university role of graduate training for the labor market, employers' behavior seems to indicate a different perception of the university function and implicitly of the study programs. Thus, over 50% of the employers said they organize professional training courses for the new graduates employed (either at the workplace, or through specialized programs). The employers call to enhance graduate training through special courses can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, an interpretation would be that employers are not very satisfied with the training provided by universities, as 33% of employers believe that the duty to prepare graduates for employment belongs to universities. The second way of interpretation is that the companies' requirements and needs are so specific that university courses should be supplemented by special courses organized shortly after recruitment. Thus, 28% of employers considered that the responsibility for preparing to work belongs to the employers, and not at all to the universities.

Both the above interpretations show that the perception of academic staff and employers about the training requirements of the labor market are not compatible, given that 70% of academic staff considered that between what is done in an academic department or faculty and what is required at the workplace there are no significant differences. One of the reasons is that on the one hand, neither the academics, nor the employers have yet seen all transition effects of the Bologna structure, and on the other hand, the employers perceive graduate training as a burden or additional duty, and not as business policy - as it is in countries with advanced economy, and in powerful companies in which their activity quality is a priority.

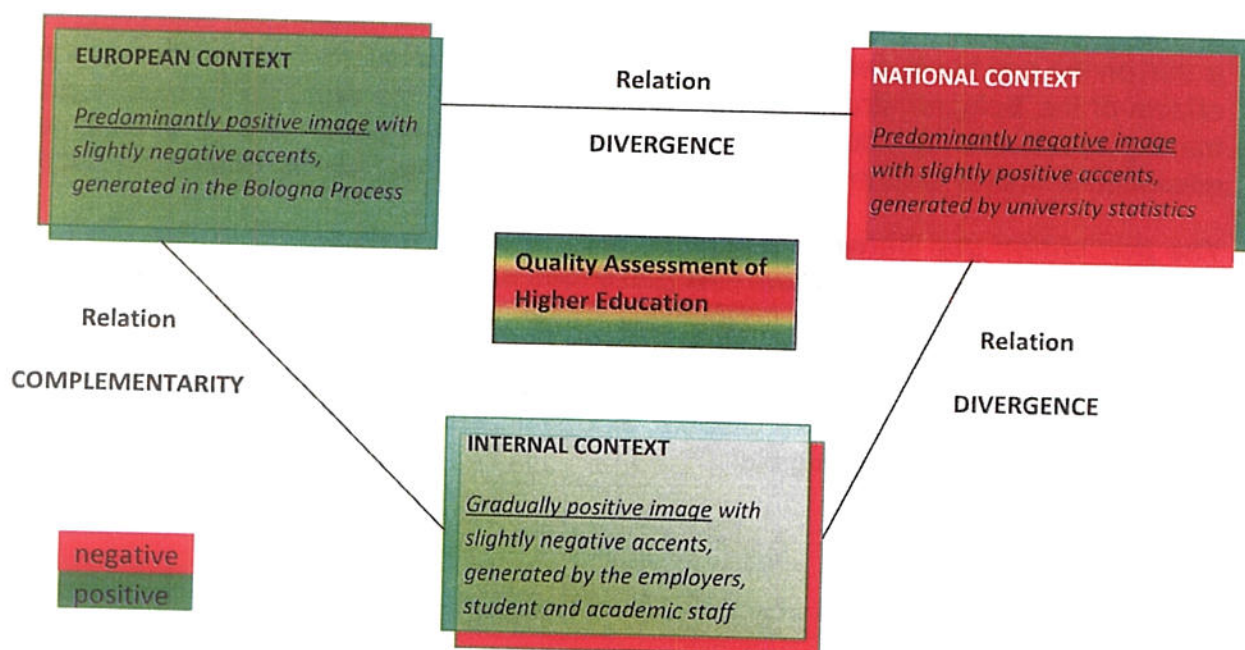
8. ***The perception gap between academic staff and students on the competitiveness of the Romanian higher education.*** This gap shows an overestimation trend among academic staff of the Romanian education in relation to Western education. Thus, 59% of academic staff believes that Romanian education is at least as good as that of Western Europe, while only 41% of students support such view. Comparing this situation to the European universities, the first percentage of 59% is more credible, at least in areas related to training in professions such as: medicine, engineering etc.

7. Gaps and Differences on Perspectives and Relations

The presented gaps indicate a *trend among academic staff to predominantly positively evaluate the educational content quality. The positive content of the perception of higher education academic quality decreases as we shift focus from the academic staff* (who are more positively oriented in relation to education) *to employers* (which, although they do not find in graduates the things they value as most important, one may say they are moderately satisfied with the training level of university graduates).

The gaps and divergences distributed on two steps (inter-contextual and intra-contextual) can now be synthetically represented in the form of the below chromatic map:

Graph no. 1.3. Chromatic map of gaps and divergences



8. Representations on ARACIS

ARACIS activity is carried out by 1542 external evaluators³¹ who come from almost all institutional academic communities. Consequently, the agency is a product which follows both the positive and negative characteristics of the academia. Despite the representativeness of the relationship between ARACIS and the academia, the activity profile of the Agency (purpose, objectives, operation mode etc.) **has a rather low or at most moderate visibility among the academic staff in higher education.** Thus, only 50% of the academic staff say the aim and operation of ARACIS are clear to them. This percentage is quite low and indirectly shows that the universities efforts are still insufficient in terms of implementation of both internal control and quality assurance mechanisms, and in terms of disseminating information regarding the external quality assurance system in Romania (to which ARACIS belongs).

ARACIS is expected to improve its public communications strategy and the promotion of its activity profile. This is substantiated by the fact that only 47% of the academic staff can assess the degree of differentiation between ARACIS and CNEEA. According to the data, the academic staffs who know ARACIS specifics and nature are and have been involved in internal or external quality assessment of certain university study programs.

Most academic staff has no option regarding the functions that ARACIS should have. The lack of information accounts for the fact that almost half of teachers (43%) do not have an option regarding an extension or restriction of ARACIS functions. Most of them are young academics, recently employed in higher education and without managerial positions.

The relative majority of those who have expressed a viewpoint (29% of the sample) are in favor of maintaining the current functions of ARACIS. But there are some differences to be mentioned. Thus, 17% of academic staff think that ARACIS functions should be increased (this is supported in particular by people who have participated in ARACIS program evaluation activities). And 10% believe these should be reduced (most of them are from private universities, from the fields of social sciences, law, police and military).

31 In accordance with the evaluators register structure by BA study fields, set on 1 May 2009 and available at: http://www.aracis.ro/comisiile_ro

9. Final Conclusions

This report is the first ever of its kind, regarding the state of quality in the Romanian higher education system. Moreover, it is the first of a series of reports to come on a yearly basis. The final report of the series will be drafted in 2011. Summarizing the findings outlined at this stage, we can say the following:

1. So far quality assurance in the HE system and in many HEIs has been predominantly ***focused on inputs*** (i.e.: student flows, knowledge transmission and reproduction etc.) and to a much lesser extent on learning and research outcomes. The option to focus on results, as the regulatory fabric of quality assurance in higher education, has not yet been widely implemented. Therefore, there is a risk of awarded degrees and diplomas inflation which is to be far from being proportional with the professional skills available on the labor market and which a more productive and competitive economy would need.
2. Our universities are ***qualitatively distributed on hierarchical layers***, in line with their well differentiated learning and research outcomes. Most, if not all, of our universities present themselves as the Humboldtian type of universities, in which learning is based on high research performances. However, according to some estimates, still insufficiently substantiated, only just over 20% of the universities, in the generous version, and less than 5%, in a less optimistic version, reveal internationally competitive results in research and produce nationally and especially European competitive graduates.
3. ***HE is publicly underfunded and the existing public funding provides insufficient incentives for the development of an institutional competitive quality culture.*** The basic principle of public funding of HE – “resources follow the student”- used in almost all EU countries, was also introduced in Romania in 1999. Since 2002, the weight of quality indicators in the funding formula has become increasingly significant, and is currently reaching 30% of the baseline funding, the highest percentage in Europe. While governmental baseline funding provides, through its mechanisms and not through the overall amounts, quality incentives for the higher education institutions, additional funding should be even more differentiated according to quality criteria. Such proposals have been made several times by CNFIS, but still not implemented. The consequences of such a delay are rather negative when considering the development of a differentiated institutional quality culture.
4. Even though our HE image abroad, particularly with regard to the implementation of the Bologna principles and objectives, is a positive one, ***we are concerned to a lesser extent with the promotion and especially with the rigorous implementation of institutional policies and mechanisms of quality assurance and quality management.*** ARACIS is largely perceived as an agency meant just to apply complacency strategies of external quality evaluation, and that in a system where institutional quality is evenly distributed among universities; the deviation from this stereotype is strongly and publicly criticized by those who would not find themselves in such ad hoc and ante-festum established charts.
5. The Romanian higher education is heavily loaded with ***various divergences and large gaps between the contents and orientation of academics' and students' representations***

about the state of quality in HEIs. One may easily add to this various divergences and gaps between employers and academic communities. A public higher education area saturated with divergences and gaps also creates a state of confusion that regards the construction and implementation of quality assurance principles and standards.

Our academic system is diversified de facto, but uniform de jure. Unless an appropriate correspondence between the state of affairs and the normative legislation is assured, we may risk presenting to the public a distorted image of the higher education system and institutions, providing little information relevant for the future careers of the prospective students, and especially keep on wasting the public resources allocated to higher education.

We find ourselves at a crossroad: either we admit that the time has come for initiating vigorous action to identify and foster academic quality, where it exists, and penalize, guide and improve quality, where needed, or else keep a status of auto-satisfaction and complacency, which may sink us in homogeneity without prospects for competitiveness.

Quality Barometer - 2010

The State of Quality in Romanian Higher Education

- Summary -

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Introduction

In the context of the strategic project “*Quality assurance in Romanian higher education in the European context. The development of the quality of academic management at the systemic and institutional level*” – ACADEMIS¹, POSDRU contract I/2/1.2/S/1, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) undertook to report yearly, between 2009 and 2011, on the state of Romanian higher education. Thus, in the first year of implementation of the project’s Activity 2 (*Quality assurance in higher education*), ARACIS presented the *Quality Barometer 2009: Statistical distributions, interpretation and options on the state of Romanian higher education*².

The first Barometer represented an analysis of the state of Romanian higher education as a system, and was based on subjective data (perceptions and representations of students, teaching staff and employers on activities and outcomes in higher education), as well as on objective information concerning inputs, processes, and outcomes of the educational system. On the one hand, the *Quality Barometer 2009* intended to put forward comparisons between data and information about the Romanian higher education system and other European systems. On the other hand, its goal was to identify successes and achievements, but also problems or critical situations, so as to open substantive discussions on the future dynamics of Romanian higher education and higher education institutions.

The *Quality Barometer 2009* is followed and supplemented hereby in terms of methodology (an institutional approach), as well as content and theme. This document, the *Quality Barometer 2010: The state of quality in Romanian higher education*, is the second-year report resulting from the implementation of the ACADEMIS project. The *Quality Barometer 2010* provides an analysis of the operation and the consequences of fundamental higher education *institutions*³: *quality assurance, university lifestyles and autonomy*.

The data supporting the *Quality Barometer 2010* were generated by using a complex set of qualitative and quantitative methods (questionnaire surveys administered to representative samples of students, teaching staff and employers,

1 Detailed information on the project’s content and results is available at <http://proiecte.aracis.ro/academis/despre-proiect/>

2 Available for reference at <http://proiecte.aracis.ro/academis/asigurarea-calitatii-invatomantului-universitar/rezultate/>

3 We use the term *institution* in the sociological sense to refer to rules, standards, formal or informal procedures, imposed by rewards and/or sanctions which determine relatively stable behavioural patterns. Universities, governmental agencies and other collective actors with legal personality will be called *organisations*. They are established and operate on the basis of social institutions, namely a legal, procedural, normative framework.

in-depth interviews with experts from quality commissions within ARACIS and CNATDCU⁴, focused interviews with students and teaching staff concerning university lifestyles).

Another novel element in the *Quality Barometer 2010* is the analysis of the data collected by ARACIS as a result of an experimental benchmarking exercise⁵, the first of its kind in Romania, carried out on a representative sample of 29 public and private higher education institutions. The experimental benchmarking exercise was conducted between 2009 and 2010 and aimed to measure *input*, *process* and *outcome* indicators in order to establish the first benchmarks for the Romanian higher education system.

The *Quality Barometer 2010: The state of quality in Romanian higher education* is a research report comprising:

- ✓ *Quality Barometer 2010: The state of quality in Romanian higher education – A Summary;*
- ✓ *The academic practices of quality assurance and evaluation;*
- ✓ *The student-centred university;*
- ✓ *Opinions of students (in bachelor degree programs), teaching staff and employers on the state of Romanian higher education.*

The ***Quality Barometer 2010*** report presents an analysis of the operation and consequences of fundamental higher education institutions: quality assurance, university lifestyles and autonomy. In social science terms, the analysis below is usually referred to as an institutional approach.

4 National Council for the Attestation of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates.

5 For a detailed presentation of the *benchmarking* concept but also of ARACIS's objectives in carrying out the benchmarking exercise at the level of the Romanian higher education institutions, see the following documents: "*Proposal on performance indicators for a benchmarking process at the level of the Romanian higher education institutions*", "*Primary and secondary indicators for the evaluation of quality*" and "*Bilingual Glossary (Romanian - English) of terms in higher education*". The documents are available at

<http://proiecte.aracis.ro/academis/indicatori-de-referinta/rezultate/>.

Institutional Analysis

Institutional analysis⁶ (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; North, 1990) is a type of research in the social sciences that aims to reveal the effects of formal policies, informal rules, and interpretations associated to representative practices in a specific social area (in our case, higher education) on the organisations in the respective field (in this case, universities). The analysis emphasizes the ways in which various *social institutions* – legal standards, regulations, procedures, and meanings associated to them – put forward and activate material or symbolic incentives (reputation, confidence, accreditation); and how these incentives generate configurations of processes, strategies and academic practices. Therefore, we do not intend to study the individual characteristics of the organisation of universities, but the ways in which policies and actions articulated at the practical level influence the manner in which universities operate. The consequences of the policies and actions of the state and its associated agencies on the ways in which the universities operate may be *intended* – consistent with a previously established set of objectives –, or they may be *unintended* (in which case they may prove to be dysfunctional and have perverse effects) or constitute latent functions unanticipated by the decision-makers who projected them.

This type of analysis is firstly concerned with the institutional design (rules, procedures, structures) formally imposed by political actors. It focuses mainly on explaining the ways in which formal (legal) institutions operate, and the consequences they bring about at the level of educational organisations. Secondly, the analysis also addresses the emergent informal practices or rules in higher education, specifically teaching and learning processes and quality assurance. For this, we consider routine actions carried out throughout daily university life by academics and students, actions which are taken-for-granted, accepted as such, and reproduced unintentionally based on conceptions shared as ad-hoc mental schemes.

This *Report* makes reference to one or another of these directions of institutional analysis, particularly following two types of processes

- quality assurance, and
- teaching and learning configurations,

as they function under the conditions of operation and internalisation of the principle of university autonomy.

⁶ The institutional analysis we propose must not be mistaken for the evaluations carried out by ARACIS concerning the quality of a specific higher education organisation (institutional evaluation). Our analysis addresses higher education organisations and does not refer to the state of the quality at the organizational level.

Social institutions, specifically laws, regulations, procedures and practices, have several generative sources:

- the state, governmental actors (Government, Ministry of Education) and associated councils (ARACIS, CNFIS⁷, ACPART⁸, CNCSIS⁹, CNATDCU), European organisations in the field of professional regulation;
- the behaviours and practices of universities which are commonly perceived as prestigious or highly successful;
- the professions.

Beside the consequences that the regulations and actions of the central decision-makers have on the operation of universities, we also consider the mutual influences of universities which belong to the same academic field. The trend whereby emergent universities copy the ways in which studies are organised in universities that are perceived as prestigious brings about what we refer to as *structural isomorphism*.

The institutional approach briefly sketched above provides the basis for this *Quality Barometer 2010*. We do not consider here the individual performance of universities, though we try to provide relevant suggestions on the operation of the entire system, given the set of constraints, significations, and artefacts present at the systemic level.

This report's objective is to provide a basis for substantive discussions on the future dynamics of Romanian higher education and higher education organisations. Thus, we aim neither to glorify the successes, nor to generalise on the system's critical condition, but rather intend to submit for debate some possible solutions in terms of the *policy implications* resulting from the analysis herein. Starting from the premises of the analysis we propose, we draw attention to the fact that certain critical conditions are not imputable either to universities in general or to central organisations individually considered. The institutional analysis indicates the way in which social rules and practices interact in order to generate a set of incentives that determine the development of universities. Most of the time, the final consequences of applying a set of rules are different from those anticipated. As such, we will try to identify inconsistencies among the formal policies that are promoted and the actual practices of universities. Their identification has a series of practical implications and, consequently, we suggest some policies for a more efficient institutional design.

7 The National Council for University Funding.

8 The National Council for Higher Education Qualifications and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment.

9 The National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education.

Methodology

This analysis was produced with a complex set of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection:

- *questionnaire survey* addressing the opinions and perceptions of teaching staff, students and employers concerning the operation and performance of higher education; representative samples were used at the national level, both for the student population, and for the teaching staff and employers;
- *in-depth interviews* with experts from the ARACIS and CNATDCU quality commissions, addressing the operation of academic quality assurance commissions and recruitment processes in higher education;
- *focused interviews* with students and teaching staff about university lifestyles;
- *secondary analysis* of the information included in universities' (self) evaluation quality reports and strategic documents.

The instruments used (questionnaires, interview guides, documents' analysis grid) and other methodological details (procedures for the selection of subjects, interviewing methods etc.) are presented in the appendices to the *Quality Barometer 2010*.

General View of Romanian Higher Education

The perceptions of academics, students and employers suggest that the general view of Romanian higher education is that it is a high-quality system. Nevertheless, when considering the system's goals the resulting picture is essentially that of a self-centred system. It is the perception of a system whose connections to the environment are insufficiently explored and analysed, which follows its own coherent logic but is not really involved in society but relatively disconnected from it.

The data collected during the quantitative research carried out last year and the data collected this year generate contradictory images that can only represent different angles and rapports to the same system. Thus, students, teaching staff and employers continue to have an overall positive image of the state of quality in the higher education system. But the positive perceptions of the state of quality are doubled by insistent mentions of the decreasing confidence in universities, especially in what their relation to the labour market is concerned. This apparent paradox between the positive valuing of the overall image of quality and the lack of confidence in the capacity of universities to reach certain ends may be explained by an ambiguity related to the social functions of the university. *We still find ourselves in a society where the university is regarded as a provider of general academic training whose services should be accessed only by the best (the nostalgia of admission exams is still widespread) and whose main purpose is to prepare elites.*

This perception of the university in rather academic, selective terms is also suggested by the following: the teaching staff are relatively critical of the quality of students. Whereas in 2009 the answers indicated that good students represented almost half of the students' total, in 2010 the figure decreased substantially¹⁰. Moreover, the academics' dissatisfaction with the quality of candidates burdens the relationship between the university and the pre-university educational systems. On the one hand, the university teaching staff expect high school graduates of higher quality. On the other, the decrease in students' quality appears natural and objective if one considers the relevant demographic developments: the increase in student numbers against the background of progressively smaller cohorts in the

¹⁰ According to the quantitative survey report, in 2009 42% of the teaching staff said that more than half of their students were "good". In the 2010 sample, the figure decreased to a considerably lower 19%. Thus, in 2010 only 4% of the respondents indicated that good students represented more than three quarters of those they were working with, 15% stated that good students amounted to between a half and three quarters of their students, 33% said that good students represented less than a half, and the relative majority of the teaching staff (46%) indicated that the share of good students was lower than one quarter of their students.

age groups relevant for higher education (as a result of the decreasing birth rate after 1990) generates students of lower average academic quality. The teaching staff's negative perception is subjective and triggered by their relatively high standards.

This conservative perception contrasts with the strategies adopted by universities stimulated by the current funding scheme, which encourages the enrolment of larger numbers of students in order to guarantee basic funding. On the one hand, given this funding policy, universities should be encouraged to set coherent strategies of attracting students according to their own missions and aspirations. The current tensions, as far as perceptions are concerned, result from the inconsistencies between the tacitly and/or explicitly assumed mission and the practical strategies promoted. On the other hand, the funding methods should be diversified in order to enable differentiation and diversification of the services provided by universities.

Another tension related to the representations of the system's quality derives from the *overall perception of its capacity to prepare graduates for the labour market*. Employers adopt a relatively neutral position. However, in the employers' perception there is also an important gap between the required and the actual level of graduates' competences. On the other hand, a substantial majority of university teaching staff credit the academic system with much or very much confidence when it comes to its capacity to provide the labour market with high-quality graduates. *These two types of actors – employers and academics – entertain opposing views of the university, with the academics' image being much more positive*. Overcoming this tension is essential to the *social involvement* of the higher education system, which otherwise runs the risk of losing contact with the labour market and of determining a significant deterioration of its image in the future. However, one should not ignore the fact that the labour market is not properly structured either. There is no national long-term development programme to guide universities in establishing their strategies. The higher education system is not required to react only to the current state of the labour market, but especially to its state as foreseen over the coming three, four or even eight years. The current economic crisis has deepened the uncertainty regarding the subsequent development of the labour market.

The employers' lack of confidence also stems from the fact that, as revealed by the *Quality Barometer 2009*, work experience is considered by this type of actors a criterion more important than the grade point average or the reputation of the program attended by the graduates. Most employers prefer graduates who worked either part-time (40%) or full-time (26%) during their studies; only 7% of the employers would rather have graduates who did not have a job during that time. Also, employers prefer MA graduates and, when it comes to bachelor degrees, they favour pre-Bologna graduates (in both cases valuing the longer

study period). Furthermore, public universities are preferred to private ones.

Beyond these somewhat contradictory perceptions with respect to the overall image of the quality of higher education, a more careful examination of data also indicates significant differences relative to the personal features of students and teaching staff. Thus, *seniority within the system* differently influences the way academics and students perceive the system's overall quality. If, as far as students are concerned, their opinions about quality grow more negative as they advance in their studies, teachers tend to have a more positive attitude to the higher education system as they advance in their teaching careers. In particular, lecturers are the most critical, associate professors somewhat less critical, while full professors have the most optimistic views among the teaching staff.

Nevertheless, this paradox is not difficult to explain for both categories, i.e., students and professors. As far as students are concerned, as they approach the end of their academic experience they get progressively estranged from the university, feeling less and less a part of it, finding themselves increasingly under the pressure of their future insertion on the labour market. Therefore they tend to become more critical. On the other hand, this may also be an instance of a *fundamental attribution error*¹¹: as they advance in the years of study, students become more aware that their initial expectations were not entirely met and tend to put the blame on the system (and less on their own errors in choosing). In the case of the teaching staff, as they move ahead in their careers and titles academics increasingly identify themselves with the higher education institution. Therefore expressing negative opinions about the latter would be a form of self-criticism. In order to avoid such a *cognitive dissonance*¹² between their personal image and the image of the institution, the full professors' opinions are essentially positive.

Furthermore, interviews with experts from the CNATDCU commissions reveal another interesting fact which underscores the closed-system image of higher education: *university endogamy*, i.e., universities practice of recruiting an overwhelming proportion of the new teaching staff from their own graduates. This shows, on the one hand, that the labour market for teaching staff recruitment does not work, and that there is not enough trust in external certifications and no valid information about the future employees' competences. Universities would rather rely on their internal resources from which they can obtain, through references but especially by direct knowledge, much more valuable and valid information. However, current university practices are reproduced through the

11 *Fundamental attribution error* is a term in social psychology referring to individuals' tendency to explain personal successes by their own qualities and to attribute personal failures to external causes.

12 *Cognitive dissonance* is a term in social psychology which refers to an individual's discomfort caused by holding conflicting opinions and ideas simultaneously; the discomfort is overcome by changing these attitudes, conceptions, beliefs.

initial professional socialisation of future employees within the same institution, while the ability to attract diversified human capital is limited. At the same time, the university's communication with the wider social and academic environment is reduced, and the innovation potential is likewise limited.

Differentiation in The Teaching and Learning Processes

The analysis below places learning in a wider context. We shall refer to the learning processes within the university, facilitated by the formal curriculum, as well as to non-formal education, to the processes whereby students become graduates, future employees with an academic degree. To this end, we were mainly interested in the students' opinions about the educational processes and their quality, but also in the ways in which students spend their leisure time, in their lifestyles in general and their values.

Time Allocated to Learning

In order to empirically show the necessity of a holistic approach to learning, let us start with an interesting and significant result: the manner in which students spend their time in a standard work-and-leisure week. On average, for Romanian students this week is 59-hour long. Within this week, they allocate 19 hours to courses and seminars/laboratories at the university, 9 hours to individual study, 8 hours to productive activities, 6 hours to household activities and 17 hours to leisure time. If one took Bologna curricula as a standard, the number of credits would be calculated on the basis of an effort of 8 hours per day, which means 40 hours a week. However, in reality the Romanian students spend 28 hours for study at most (19 hours in course and seminar rooms and 9 hours of individual study) – even less in fact if one takes into account the fact that, out of the 19 hours dedicated to attending courses and seminar/laboratory classes, pauses (not only the formal ones) ought to be subtracted. Even if these data are subjective, as they represent students' own representations of their own time, they still suggest a *gap between the formal standards – curricula, syllabi – and the proper learning activity*. Then again, formal standards are subject to a continuous negotiation process that is often poorly regulated. The “negotiation” carried between students and the university on the time allotted to the studying is a recurrent theme in the students' discourse. With leisure time as a real concern, students do their best in rendering the imposed timetable *more flexible* and in adapting it to their own plans. On the other hand, if they are to take into consideration the students'

rational strategies, universities would need to enforce more strictly the minimum conditions for passing exams, including attendance to courses and seminars. The problem is that enforcement that is too strict runs the risk of alienating a significant number of students and, implicitly, an important source of funding for the universities.

Although the gap between the formal study plans and norms, on the one hand, and real learning strategies, on the other hand, is widespread within Romanian academia, significant differences are likewise noticed in the characteristics of the universities that students attend: the time allocated to school attendance is longer for students in public universities compared to those in private institutions. Moreover, the time allocated to school attendance increases with the size of the university. In universities with over 15,000 students the average time allocated to attendance is 20 hours, while for students in universities with less than 1000 students the average is a mere 13 hours. In addition, there are differences triggered by students' subject areas. For example, students in exact sciences, engineering, medicine or agronomy programs allot more time to attendance by comparison with students of social sciences, humanities and economics.

Furthermore, a significantly greater number of hours spent in the university is reported by the public university students on state-funded scholarships (21 hours), by those in the fourth year of study (22 hours), by the unemployed (21 hours), by those who entered the university after an admission exam (21 hours), and by those who are involved in volunteering activities (21-22 hours). These categories of students also devote more time to individual study. The above-mentioned organisational factors (size, public/private ownership, year of study, subject areas) and personal factors (with or without scholarship, involvement in productive activities, involvement in volunteering activities) positively correlate with a higher rate of attendance, thus providing premises for higher academic quality.

Quality of Teaching

In relation to the qualitative aspects of the teaching process in universities, in the survey we carried out students were asked to grade several items which may be grouped into five important categories: (1) teaching, (2) assessment and feedback, (3) academic support, (4) access to learning resources, and (5) process management. The grades are relatively similar for all these indicators, with significant differences between the public and the private academic environments. Students in private universities tend to appreciate to a greater extent all these aspects (an approximate grade of 8, with 10 being the highest), while students in public universities give lower grades (around 7, with 10 being the highest). At the same time, there are significant, although not very substantial, gaps between the

assessments of students and of the teaching staff, the latter being more positive in evaluating the above-mentioned indicators.

The evaluation of the processes in question is subjective. Taking into account the fact that the students in private universities have lower rates of attendance of courses and seminars/laboratories, the higher grades they provide for the educational processes in their own universities may be explained by their lower interest, but also by a more superficial knowledge of the issues assessed. However, this could also be the result of a cognitive dissonance: they want to prove that the school they chose and for which they paid is good, while public university students are convinced that the state should always offer more than it actually does.

As for the contents of courses, the dominant opinions are that “the information provided in courses is of interest” but that too much emphasis is placed on memorizing, while the practical side is neglected. Too much emphasis placed on theory by comparison with practice, and the lack of the capacity to contextualise knowledge and to apply it to specific social or technical situations are recurrent complaints in students’ discourse and are shared to a certain extent by the teaching staff. The main differences lie in the fact that, while students strongly blame this state of affairs, academics tend to consider it normal and significantly adequate for the university’s mission. The great majority of teaching staff (81%, a growing proportion compared to last year’s 75%) consider that “the practical side of knowledge is learned at the work place” – an opinion trend which is very homogeneous and diametrically opposed to students’ expectations.

At the same time, a longitudinal rather than simply a transversal analysis shows an interesting trend: even if divergent, the opinions of students and those of the teaching staff tend to “converge” with respect to the quality of the educational process. Thus, the opinions of students in the 2010 sample are more favourable than those of the students in the 2009 sample whereas, in the case of the teaching staff, the comparison indicates significant changes in the opposite direction. In other words, we are dealing with a convergence of the two groups’ opinions, even if students continue to appear less enthusiastic than teaching staff in their assessment of the quality of the educational process.

Approximately half of the students maintain that the Internet is used for exchanging information related to courses – especially the online course support platforms –, but also for communication between the teaching staff and students and among students. Although almost half of the students declare that they use electronic libraries to have access to books and academic articles, the Internet is much more frequently used to access semi-academic services, such as Wikipedia or “online newspapers” (over 60% of students declare that they use the Internet for such resources).

Good Students, Good Teachers: What Lies Behind a Label?

In the quantitative survey, we considered it useful to introduce an open question which addressed both the students and the teaching staff: they were asked to list several defining characteristics for the *good student* and the *good teacher*, respectively. Open answers were subsequently codified. In the students' opinion, communication and dialogue with students, professional qualities and the ability to explain represent, in this order, the basic qualities of a *good teacher*. Thus, the pedagogical abilities are emphasised, namely the *trainer* abilities (the capacity to communicate and explain), and the abilities of a good professional in the field only come next. In relative opposition, the teaching staff's opinions about the defining qualities of a good teacher focus on professionalism and scientific research and only then on the communicational and pedagogical skills.

The passion for knowledge, seriousness and discipline are, in the academics' opinions, the defining characteristics of the *good student*. For the students, these characteristics are more fragmented, as traditional values like course attendance, seriousness and discipline are still dominant. Apparently, the passion for knowledge is not as important from the students' point of view. Nevertheless, the students' answers are much more varied, because they appreciate characteristics such as studying outside courses, researching for information and additional bibliography, availability to learn, to understand, but also team work, cooperation, and respect. Similar to the data from the quantitative survey, the outcomes of the in-depth interviews carried out as part of the qualitative survey indicated that students define a "good student" less by his or her intrinsic quality, namely the quality of participant/partner in the educational academic process, and more *by his/her lifestyle and by a set of qualities and competences associated to this lifestyle. The ideal image of the educated, intelligent, creative student, concerned with intellectual pursuits, is replaced by the model of a student endowed with social competences and abilities, with preoccupations regarding both academic life and leisure time outside it, who manages to strike a balance between the two.*

Do we have a student-centred university?

Beyond the quantitative figures, which suggest a duality of the conceptions of the main categories of actors – academics and students – concerning the teaching and learning processes, the qualitative survey aimed at outlining these conceptions in a more articulated way in relation to the question: do we have a student-centred university? The conclusion resulting from the research is that *we are dealing with a rather self-centred university, concerned with its own financial survival, students being important especially as bearers of financial resources*

(either they pay taxes, or they benefit from state scholarships). The qualitative survey report refers to a **double alienation** – on the one hand, teachers justify the low quality of the teaching process in terms of the low quality of students (such a tendency appears in the teachers' perception of the quality of students and is validated by the quantitative data); on the other hand, students find their lack of involvement in academic activities legitimate, as they often cannot draw any advantage from the latter.

The current generation of students is defined by the search for **yardsticks**, expecting the university as an institution to supply them with certainties in terms of specialisation, of training for a future career in a well-defined, specific labour sector. Nevertheless, a closer look at the strategic plans of our universities reveals that there is a significant gap in relation to the defining expectations of the current generation of students. Specifically, most of the organisations in higher education have defined, at the level of strategic documents (i.e., strategic plans and operational plans), mostly activities designed to improve and develop the infrastructure: the development and modernisation of facilities, the rehabilitation of the existing premises and the construction of new ones, equipment for laboratories etc. *There is a gap between the materialist objectives of universities and the students' post-materialist preoccupations and interests: their search for meanings, significations, objectives, and direction in personal development.* The gap is acutely felt and, within the existing institutional framework, the trend is to generalise the low level of involvement and even apathy caused by students' dissatisfaction with the university, on the one hand, and the teachers' dissatisfaction with the system (and especially with the severe lack of funding), on the other.

The relative alienation of the university from its students should also be looked at in terms of the way in which incentives are allocated, of the essential resources for the survival of universities, namely funding and accreditation. These by no means encourage a focus on students. Here is why:

- 1) There is a serious external constraint, namely the chronic underfunding of universities, which makes them focus on their own survival, which depends mostly on the student flows and less on students' academic wellbeing.
- 2) In the evaluation of universities and in granting them symbolic incentives, such as accreditation and/or recognition as a good university, emphasis is placed on research rather than on the teaching processes or on the students' achievements. Consequently, universities are compelled to give research indicators a greater weight than to indicators measuring students' current concerns and needs. A university's focus on teaching and consequently on students is the social expression of the fact that it cannot reach high research standards, which is equivalent to a "sanction" on its reputation.

Therefore, once students enter the higher education system, their **discourse**

on the **future strategies** and long-term plans reflects a pattern that leaves little room for individual variations. In future strategies, the university appears only as a **threshold that has to be passed** in order to guarantee a better future¹³. This happens not only by virtue of the competences they create, but also due to the diploma received at the end of the bachelor degree cycle. The society of certifications has become a reality not only in Romania but in the entire world. Everything depends on obtaining a higher education degree, since occupational allocation is certainly based on certification. Therefore, the students' preoccupation with getting the certification is a rational and widespread strategy. Nonetheless, students' expectations from the university are not limited to certification. The paucity of practical training is doubled by the lack of orientation, the anxiety caused by the uncertainty of finding a job and by the perception of the university's disinterest in students' future. The students' view of higher education organisations is that *the university is not an institution that generates meanings or provides directions*. Thus, students appear alone in the face of uncertainty and insecure about the type of education they receive in academia.

Students' Values and The Social Environment – Alienated by Colleagues, Relatively Intolerant, But Close to God

As for establishing relations with colleagues, the first characteristic of students is *individualism*. They feel alienated not so much in relation to their colleagues but especially in relation to the university as an environment which does not favour cooperation but rather competition for being noticed. Students try to make themselves noticed to teachers for rather pragmatic reasons: getting good marks and consequently, in the case of state-funded public universities, scholarships.

The data in the questionnaire shows that students' most frequently invoked leisure activities are going to pubs, bars and terraces, shopping and clubbing. At the opposite end of the spectrum they selected going to the theatre, museums and the opera. On the other hand, a strong argument to support the findings related to student individualism is the fact that only some 11-12% of the students are involved in volunteer work. The incidence of volunteer work is significantly higher among state university students compared to private university students.

As for their *values*, students are as **intolerant** as the population as a whole, a

¹³ There was a significant increase in the number of students who consider that "the degree is useful only because it allows students to get a job more easily", from 57% in 2009 to 69% this year. On the other hand, the motivational mix consists of the extrinsic component of access on the labour market to better remunerated jobs, as well as of the intrinsic motivation: almost half of the students say they attend the courses of a faculty in order to "have better knowledge", while an equal number of students say that their motivation is their desire to obtain a "job that pays better".

fact which reveals the insignificant contribution of an academic education in this respect. Approximately 55% of the respondents would not want Roma persons or individuals of a different sexual orientation as their neighbours. At the same time, students are religious persons, much like the rest of the Romanian population: at the level of the entire sample, the average score for how important God is in their lives, on a scale from 1 ("Not at all important") to 10 ("Very important") is 8.3, indicating that students consider religious belief very important. Students are more flexible when it comes to the boundaries between right and wrong. These boundaries clear and applicable in every situation for a mere 23%, while for 42% straying may be justified in certain situations. Some 36% consider that there is no clear limit between what is right and what is wrong.

All this indicates that *students are atomized to a great extent, having relatively few value yardsticks within the society and that, if the latter exist, they are rather transcendental. The data seem to suggest that the university does not accomplish its mission of civic, scientific and social education, limiting itself to being an authority granting academic certification.* On the other hand, one must mention that students' values should not be ascribed only to the university, as it is structured by the family, influenced by primary and secondary education as well as by the mass-media and other social authorities.

University quality assurance practices

Quality assurance as a concept was introduced in Romanian higher education with Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 and subsequently regulated under Law no. 87/2006. The existing legislative framework refers to two major objectives of quality assurance: quality control and quality enhancement. Furthermore, the law makes reference to the freedom of education providers to select and enforce the most relevant measures and standards, as well as to the need of each such organisation to comply with a pre-determined set of relevant standards for a set of criteria. We have, in this respect, two opposite quality assurance philosophies: one in which quality is associated with institutional objectives (*fitness for purpose*), and another one in which quality is tied to a set of pre-determined and universal standards (*standardization*). The first philosophy focuses on the external audit/evaluation and is based on the elaboration of recommendations for quality enhancement. The second outlook focuses on external control and accreditation. The second is more prescriptive and thus more coercive. Although the law's preamble explicitly mentions both directions, the most important subsequent legislative provisions tie the Romanian system of quality assurance to the second philosophy. Moreover, as far as comprehensive universities are concerned, the

standards are universal¹⁴, practically operating with a single reference class for all universities. Differentiation is carried out only vertically, function of the extent to which universities attain reference standards which are higher than the minimal ones according to various criteria specified in the national legislation.

The Historical Context of Quality Institutionalisation

Like many ex-socialist states, post-1989 Romania witnessed a period of strong expansion of the academic offer. The number of higher education organisations increased from 46 in 1989 to 63 in 1993 and then to 126 in 2000. The number of enrolled students grew from 215,226 in the academic year 1991/1992 to 503,152 in 2000/2001, then soared to 907,353 in 2007/2008¹⁵ for all levels of education. The demand for higher education programmes was very high in the first decade after the revolution, prompting entrepreneurs to provide diversified services (alternative types of education, such as distance education) to an expanding market. The problem identified starting with 1993 was the safeguarding of consumers' interests. The consumer was in a traditional position of asymmetric information¹⁶ vis-à-vis public and, especially, private providers of education services. The state needed to assume the role of consumer protection agency, so the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) was established, with the role of accrediting universities and imposing minimal quality control.

The Law on Quality Assurance no. 87/2006 introduced a series of legislative changes by means of which the concept of quality was rendered endogenous, that is, assumed by higher education organisations rather than imposed from the outside. Thus, the law provides for a culture of quality, for the responsibility of educational organisations in quality assurance etc. The introduction of the institution of internal quality assurance, which materialised in the establishment of quality evaluation and assurance commissions (CEACs), was a fundamental initiative. Moreover, the establishment of the registry of experts in external evaluation based on peer-review procedures was another important step in the direction of quality assurance. Consequently, two basic principles were instituted: internal quality

14 There are different standards for the specialized universities (art, medicine etc.) but they are common within the respective field, regardless of the university's objectives/mission.

15 <http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/pdf/ro/cap8.pdf>

16 Informational asymmetry represents a decisional situation in transactions where one of the parties has systematically more information than the other and uses this information to its own advantage. Markets operate defectively in such situations and governmental intervention is required to reduce the information gap between the two parties. The example of the higher education is paradigmatic in this respect: given the nature of their investment (whose benefits are only visible on long term) students have systematically poorer access to information about the quality and performance of the universities they want to enrol in; universities, as rational actors, tend to hide unfavourable information and promote only the positive information. By standardizing certain indicators, the state compels universities to provide comparable and relevant data for the customers.

assurance and assuming the latter at the level of educational organisations and peer-review-based processes for purposes of external evaluation.

The Internalisation of The Quality Assurance Principle

The quantitative data collected this year seem to suggest that the innovations of Law no. 87/2006 were internalised and assumed by the members of the professoriate. Most of them (more precisely 52% of the academics) believe that the university or faculty should be the decision-maker in quality assurance (assuming responsibility for quality at the organisational level), while a comparable percentage of 48% still indicate the ministry and central agencies as the main entities responsible for this process. At the same time, academics consider that the most efficient way of evaluating the quality of the educational programmes is "on the basis of a national system of performance indicators" (41%) but also by "considering the opinions of those involved in academic life" (26%). These data suggest that the professoriate has internalised the unitary system of indicators and standards as well as the *peer-review* principle. However, when asked about the most important criteria for quality evaluation the majority of respondents referred to input indicators: human resources, course content, and material assets.

One can state that, in the professors' perception, the new quality assurance concepts have begun to develop and the process of change is in full progress. Nevertheless, at present the potential for change under the current legislative framework (law and evaluation methodology) seems to be exhausted. Although the institutionalisation of this model definitely had the positive effects mentioned above, in the current stage of development of the higher education system the unintentional effects are starting to show. Some of these unintended effects are dysfunctional in relation to the goals of quality assurance. Therefore, one of the important problems today is designing institutions for quality assurance that should prevent the emergence of such effects.

Dysfunctional Forms of Quality Institutionalisation

What follows is a brief account of how these *dysfunctions* have been generated. We will consider two critical resources that universities depend on: funding and accreditation. Both are granted depending on the fulfilment of standards which are defined in detail by strongly prescriptive methodologies. Accreditation depends on fulfilling the minimal standard levels with respect to a set of criteria grouped in three main areas (institutional capacity, educational efficiency and quality management). It is a well known fact that a thorough specification of the

standards and indicators by means of which universities are assessed involves methodological problems. The reporting parties have more information than those conducting the evaluation, and consequently evaluators are in a position of informational asymmetry in relation to the evaluated. The problem becomes even more serious as the number of standards and indicators increases, especially when they specifically address process- and input-related issues. When the stake is very high (accreditation is perceived as a critical resource) and the adoption of semi-illicit behaviours cannot be sanctioned, *standard imitation* is a rational behaviour. Preventing such behaviour *by control alone* is almost impossible at the systemic level under the given conditions (external evaluation resources are limited). Thus, in the present form, the law tends rather to reward *formalism* and *compliance* with the standards, and does not support to the same degree an endogenous process of developing an internal system of quality assurance.

Homogenisation is manifest in the missions of universities (codified in university charters), in internal mechanisms and procedures of quality assurance (the operation of CEACs as academic technostructures) or in other internal regulations (for instance, those regarding university ethics), as well as with respect to the ways in which programs and teaching and learning processes are organized (academic operational structures). Emergent universities tend to copy the organisation models developed by the universities with a certain tradition and reputation in order to diminish the uncertainty and anxiety related to recognition and accreditation. Therefore, if we consider the institutional structures for internal quality assurance alone, the background of our higher education comes to be dominated by copies of the same model, with few *sui generis* solutions responding to different needs.

Of course, in some cases – such as the regulated professions (or even the technical higher education, psychology etc.) – compliance with certain standards, sometimes defined at the European level, stimulates quality enhancement by setting the bar very high. Compliance with these standards, provisions, and regulations plays the same role of legitimizing the activity of universities which provide programmes of this type.

There are several reasons to consider homogenisation a negative trend. On the one hand, it inhibits institutional creativity: universities are not stimulated to offer varied learning options adapted to the diversity of customers' needs, as traditional solutions tend to be rewarded instead (by ensuring accreditation). On the other hand, homogenisation puts institutional autonomy at risk, by promoting a unitary model of organisation and operation. Even if reference indicators offer institutions options to vary in their processes, universities are not particularly concerned with individualisation and rather too concerned with formal similarity, which reduces the uncertainty of accreditation and financing. The end result is strong structural isomorphism in formal respects and an informal diversity expressed in academic practices which frequently do not converge.

Isomorphism and homogeneity are associated to another institutional phenomenon: the trend of *decoupling* the common practices from the formal rules, which are instantiated but inoperative. It is this decoupling that best characterises the internal quality assurance procedures and mechanisms within universities. According to the qualitative survey, the CEACs' operation may be characterised as *ritualistic* – these structures are (re)activated on the occasion of the authorisation, accreditation or periodical external evaluation of the university or its study programmes. Accreditation, authorisation or periodical institutional evaluation are the occasions on which the internal (pseudo-)evaluation is carried out. The latter is most of the time reduced to checking that the paperwork was adequately compiled. The CEACs do not provide professional services of quality improvement within the university, for example by establishing an internal methodology, by elaborating and internally debating practices, criteria and reports, by organising training sessions etc. They operate in a discontinuous and quasi-formal manner, limiting themselves to prior control of technical conformity before the documentation reaches the central evaluating body (ARACIS). The inability of quality commissions to provide substantial quality enhancement services also results from some objective data: in most universities, a single employee is responsible for the quality assurance of sometimes as many as 50 study programmes. The *CEACs are poorly professionalized in terms of their staff*, with their personnel being recruited in part-time positions from among the members of the teaching staff and “benefitting” from ad-hoc training.

One conclusion based on the empirical evidence gathered from the subjective and objective data is that the current quality assurance standards, procedures, and methodologies have engendered the premises but have so far failed to determine the creation of local cultures of quality in all universities. Many universities do not employ internal evaluation as a management instrument in current quality enhancement activities, but treat it as a formal institution disconnected from daily operations, whose main function is the official recognition before accreditation bodies. *Internal evaluation does not fulfil, in most of the cases, a function in quality assurance*, but is a technical, preliminary stage in the process of accreditation and external evaluation. Quality assurance remains a centralised function, at the level of the university, playing only an auxiliary role in the organisational techno-structure and remaining external to the operational area, to the real teaching and learning processes.

Conclusions

The Quality Barometer 2010 puts forth a dual image of Romanian higher education: mostly positive, but plagued by concerns about specific goals. A similar trend was recorded in 2009 and confirms the gap between the general perception and the satisfaction with respect to specific ends and goals of higher education. This duality is the result of the ambiguity of goals: the missions and objectives of the universities are not assumed in operational terms, they are weakly differentiated and, most of the time, the strategies are not conducive to them. For instance, as shown in the report, almost all Romanian universities claim a national vocation but fail to develop concrete action plans related to their assumed mission. Moreover, scientific research is mentioned by almost all universities but scientific production (expressed in completed doctorates and articles) is very low in most of the cases.

The gap between the mission, the objectives and the current strategies and practices in universities is mainly the result of the unproductive allocation of incentives function of formal input and process indicators; and of the promotion through the legislative framework (the law and methodology of quality assurance) of the single, quasi-generalised, taken-for-granted model of the traditional university which tends to be copied by most universities, be they renowned or emergent. On the other hand, the financial incentives under the current system of budgetary allocation per student push in the direction of increasing the number of students. The number of students is only an *input* indicator and, without other types of policies to address the *output*, universities are not stimulated to become more sensitive to students' needs or their accomplishments after they leave the system. Increasing access to higher education is, on the other hand, an objective in itself, assumed by Romania within the Europe 2020 Strategy. This indicator must not be dealt with separately but should rather be correlated with the system's performance measured in terms of graduates' performance, but also in terms of students' satisfaction with academic life.

The data collected through qualitative methods (interviews) for this *Barometer* suggest that we do not have a student-centred university, but rather a university concerned mainly with its financial survival in a hostile environment, an institution which is self-centred and keen to benefit from the critical survival resources (financing and accreditation). Conversely, the students' world suggests they are on a continuous quest for meanings and yardsticks, especially concerning their professional orientation, career and role as future active citizens. The university offers too little in this respect and is still much too "academic" in demands and poor in achievement. More clearly formulated, more realistic and more feasible objectives, at the level of the university and its study programmes, could be the solution for universities' greater responsibility and responsiveness. Allocating the financial and symbolic incentives (accreditation, recognition) according

to the extent to which universities/study programmes manage to achieve their own objectives, and not just the standards which are imposed from the outside and more or less relevant for one university or another, could be a solution to diversifying higher education institutions, to achieving greater individualisation and focusing on students' needs.

At the same time, the data show that we are dealing with a new learning culture, a culture of pragmatism and personal comfort: students invest only in order to obtain a certification, leisure time is valued, as are life and learning experiences outside the school. The student-centred university cannot ignore such realities and is called on to innovate in terms of curriculum and methods in order to demand a greater share of students' time, especially since students' current involvement in the academic world is rather low. Therefore, we need a new teaching culture, centred on training and knowledge facilitation. What is especially needed are institutional mechanisms encouraging universities to assume such a culture.

The study also reveals that students particularly value communication competences and the teaching staff's pedagogical skills, while the latter appreciate especially professional competences in their own research field. In students' opinion, a good student is able to strike a balance between academic obligations (attendance, good marks etc.) and his/her lifestyle and involvement in leisure and social activities. The students' preoccupation with learning and professional development and the professors' preoccupation with scientific production (more precisely with fulfilling the indicators on scientific production) are not always fully convergent. There are gaps resulting from the ways in which incentives are allocated: universities and teachers are evaluated according to their scientific production (easier to quantify and account for) and not according to their achievements in the teaching processes, measured either subjectively – by the students' degree of satisfaction, or objectively – by students' performance.

If students' academic performance is less important in the formal evaluation and university accreditation processes, non-formal education and students' personal and social development are completely ignored. Although non-formal and informal education are in themselves strategies of personal development that are complementary to the academic one, students seem to be atomized and alienated from the university, as well as from their own colleagues, trying to find other types of yardsticks, mainly outside the university. Universities should be encouraged to stimulate students' participation in the academic community.

Unfortunately, the current national legislative framework for higher education – the provisions on quality assurance and accreditation, as well as those on funding – does not offer solutions to these problems and tensions. The framework of our academic system is not conceived so as to stimulate institutional diversity, to reward innovation and encourage social entrepreneurship, but rather supports a classic

model of academic development, generalising standard quality conditions for an increasingly greater number of beneficiaries of educational services. Universities attract students by an inflation of specialisations included in the reputable subject areas, but the educational offer is not really diversified and designed according to students' needs and interests.

As far as the two quality assurance philosophies described at the beginning of the previous chapter are concerned, the current quality assurance system in Romania is centred on accreditation and provision of certifications. Briefly, it can be characterized as

- prescriptive, coercive;
- centralized;
- focused on control and accreditation;
- focused on input and process indicators.

Such a system proved useful in the period of uncontrolled expansion of universities, which mainly took the form of an entrepreneurial capitalisation on an incipient but very dynamic higher education market. And it is still useful considering the fact that the social responsibility of universities remains low. Currently, new internal functional quality assurance institutions and the creation of a genuine culture of academic quality are needed to a greater extent than state control and paternalism towards education providers and customers. When taking into account the existing tensions between the perceptions of students and academics or the recent changes in students' lifestyle and ethos, it becomes clear that we are dealing with a new academic reality which requires the application of another philosophy of quality assurance.

Policy Recommendations

The diagnosis above suggests that we need policies that should determine the repositioning of higher education with respect to the new realities. The emergence of a *new culture of university research, teaching and learning*, focused on the acquisition of teaching and learning as well as on research performance, is absolutely necessary. Such a culture may be promoted through the establishment of several important targets at system level:

- improving quality and raising universities' responsibility and responsiveness; higher education institutions should be stimulated to become more sensitive towards students' needs and expectations;
- institutional diversification, individualisation of universities' and adoption of specific missions operationalised in development strategies.

We suggest three policy lines by means of which the above-stated targets could be promoted. These policy lines are hardly exhaustive. We offer them as proposals which, together with others but also through a wider debate with representatives of the academic environment, could lead to a consensual strategy on the future design of quality assurance institutions:

- (1) Elaborating instruments by means of which the processes of quality adoption and quality improvement would be stimulated to become endogenous, decentralised, and initiated from the bottom up. One should start by raising awareness and acceptance among the teaching staff, students, and university management. The academic ethos suggests that the premises for the success of such an approach do exist. *Decentralisation and empowerment* of teaching staff, of departments and faculties, are urgently needed, as are incentives to encourage quality adoption, creativity concerning internal mechanisms and procedures, and the rewarding of relevant good practices. Assuming viable internal quality assurance and evaluation procedures would make the university more sensitive to students' personal development needs and more focused on them. Encouraging diversity, creativity and curricular innovation may be carried out by moving the focus from external evaluation to the *internal adoption of quality and to external assistance for quality enhancement*.
- (2) Universities' missions should be defined in operational terms and assumed by relevant academic communication. Establishing purposes, objectives, missions should not remain a formal exercise, but should coalesce in a medium- and long-term development programme. Creativity and innovation in formulating academic missions as well as the individualisation of universities may be encouraged through the (*non-*

hierarchical) classification of universities in a manner which provides incentives for complementary routes of institutional development and avoids the standardisation of processes, functions and models which characterises the current legislative framework.

- (3) *Revising the quality assurance philosophy* is also necessary. It would be desirable for the *quality-policing* principle to coexist with the *quality-enhancement* principle and for the latter to gradually become dominant as the internal institutionalisation of quality increases. ARACIS's functions could change gradually from *hard* ones, focused on control procedures, to *soft* functions focused on facilitation and elaboration of recommendations, presentation of good practices etc. Concrete measures would include:
- revising the methodology of external evaluation by ensuring decentralisation and more focus on *quality enhancement* and less on control; auditing internal quality assurance systems, encouraging and supporting universities in establishing such systems;
 - technical assistance from ARACIS in professionalising quality assurance services at university level: training sessions, promoting good practices, assistance in designing quality assurance instruments etc. Thus, ARACIS would undertake to a considerable extent the role of a quality facilitator;
 - external evaluation should mainly focus on outcomes;
 - maintaining a more flexible accreditation system imposing minimum quality standards to organisations and programmes, and differentiated standards for authorisation and, respectively, accreditation.

Quality Barometer 2009: *Statistical distributions, interpretation and options on the state of quality in Romanian higher education* and **Quality Barometer 2010:** *The state of quality in Romanian higher education* shall be followed by a summary report in the third year of implementation of the strategic project "Quality assurance in Romanian higher education in European context. Development of the academic quality management at system and institutional level" – ACADEMIS.

This report shall, on the one hand, present the dynamics of Romanian higher education as recorded by the annual quality barometers; and, on the other hand, provide a series of references on the possible future trends in Romanian higher education in European context. Moreover, within this summary report the first benchmarks will be reported for the level of Romanian higher education organisations. These benchmarks will enable the development of classifications of higher education organizations (by means of institutional quality assurance

indicators), as well as of study programmes (by means of tertiary quality assurance indicators).

Furthermore, in the third year of the project's implementation a *policy paper* shall be drawn up, comprising the quality enhancement policy proposals at system level and function of institutional types; these proposals will be substantiated empirically by longitudinal analyses carried out within the ACADEMIS project.

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**The Code of Professional Ethics in the Evaluation
Activities for the Authorisation, Accreditation and
Quality Assurance in the Field of Higher Education
in Romania**

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I. Introduction

The efficiency of quality evaluation and accreditation in the field of higher education depends to a large extent on considering the correspondence between the academic meaning of quality, the dynamics of the educational system, and the beneficiaries' expectations. A clear consistent methodology of quality assurance presupposes that everybody involved in its application shares responsibility. Their acknowledgement of a minimal set of ethical values is a key criterion for the success of quality assurance and accreditation activities in higher education.

Therefore, the ARACIS Council **adopts**

The code of professional ethics in the evaluation activities for the authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance in the field of higher education in Romania

The Code includes a minimal set of principles, values and rules of conduct which must be considered as a benchmark for the activities of institutional quality self-evaluation and external quality evaluation, as well as for the activities of accreditation of higher education institutions. The Code aims at:

- members of the ARACIS Council and of the Advisory Board attached to ARACIS;
- members of permanent speciality commissions;
- ARACIS' evaluators and external collaborators;
- ARACIS' employed staff;
- universities, researchers, students and administrative staff in higher education institutions involved in quality assurance and accreditation activities.

The Code starts from the principles representing the reference framework of ARACIS activity, which are included in the Methodology regarding quality assurance, authorisation for temporary operation and accreditation in the field of higher education:

- European reference;
- Institutional responsibility;
- Institutional diversity;
- Cooperation with all the components of the educational system;
- Result focusing;
- Institutional identity;
- Internal institutional quality self-evaluation;
- External evaluation;
- Quality improvement.

On the basis of these principles, **the Code** aims at promoting that quality culture which contributes to the development of quality higher education, asserted as public inheritance, and worthy of public trust, and to the continuous improvement of life, cultural and economic quality in a European context.

The objectives of the **Code** are:

- Providing ethical reference to everybody involved in quality assurance and accreditation in higher education;
- Assuring transparency in the relations between evaluators and the evaluated, the evaluated and beneficiaries etc.;

- Serving as a support for the development and implementation of quality self-evaluation policies in higher education institutions;
- Assuring the observance of deontological rules in the process of temporary authorisation, accreditation and quality external evaluation;
- Assuring the observance of confidentiality rules regarding the activity carried out at the level of ARACIS Council, of permanent Commissions, independent evaluators, the staff employed and of any collaborator of ARACIS;
- Promoting trust in the implementation of external quality evaluation criteria and procedures in higher education institutions;
- Preventing the dissolution of quality judgment procedures into normative speeches, and classifications which are irrelevant to the main objective of the approach, i.e. the continuous improvement of higher education in Romania and its compliance with the European standards.

As it is a code of ethics and conduct, the document combines the assertion of certain values and principles applicable in the domain of quality assurance, with the institution of certain procedural provisions meant to create a proper environment for the development of activities, and to offer a system of evaluation, correction, contestation and sanction of the infringements of the stipulated values and principles.

The enforcement of the **Code** does not exclude and does not replace the legal rights and obligations provided for by other documents regarding quality assurance and accreditation, nor does it replace other codes of ethics established by higher education institutions or by the Ministry for Education and Research.

The **Code** must be permanently improved and updated according to the beneficiaries' suggestions and to the national and international status quo in the field of quality management and assurance in higher education.

II. The Code

A. VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

In their activity, the people aimed at by this **Code** will honour the following general values and principles:

1. Legality
2. Independence
3. Objectivity
4. Impartiality
5. Transparency
6. Personal responsibility
7. Professionalism
8. Openness to novelty
9. Dialogue and consensus
10. Confidentiality

The commitment to this range of values presupposes that all persons involved in quality assurance in higher education and in accreditation:

1. **Know, understand and fully observe the laws**, regulations and rules applicable to the field of quality assurance in higher education. They consistently use the criteria, standards and performance indicators defined by the official documents regarding: institutional capacity, educational efficiency and quality management.
2. Prove to be **independent** in their activity, do not give in to political, religious, economic, or any other kind of pressure and only accept the legal, scientific and ethical constraints.
3. They distance themselves from any kind of personal relationship and issue conclusions independent of any kind of institutional or personal commitment.
4. Adopt an **objective** attitude in the activity of quality assurance and accreditation. They provide correct information, make statements and express opinions only based on the necessary data and information, beyond any individual emotional evaluation based on preconceived ideas and impressions. They make recommendations and take decisions based exclusively on factual data and precise, thoroughly proved information.
5. Make statements and/or express their opinions **honestly, neutrally and impartially**. They do not apply double standards in the evaluation and do not take sides for or against a higher education institution, other organisation or person involved. They do not discriminate on sexual, ethnic, age, religion etc. criteria in the process of quality evaluation and accreditation.
6. Make efforts towards a maximal **transparency** regarding professional rules, procedures, requirements, evaluation principles etc. They may provide at all times reasons based on consistent and correct information for their opinions expressed and decisions made. They do not hide and alter the evidence found.
7. Assume **personal responsibility** for their expressed opinions and statements made and can prove at all times the agreement between them and the applicable regulations, the internal rules of the organization/institution, the required standards and the factual data. They accept the obligation to account for the activities initiated, their expressed opinions and conclusions, and to be held responsible for the possible failures.
8. Maintain a high level of **professional competence**. They provide consultancy and expertise grounded on well-defined and renowned standards in the field. They are based on a high degree of exigency and professional solidarity and assume the moral obligation of working for quality enhancement. The affiliation to the ARACIS Council or to other international quality evaluation bodies confers on members a professional prestige which they must not use for power reasons. Professional competence also implies **responsible professional care**. As such, those involved in quality evaluation and accreditation activities will have to prove they are good listeners and observers, will treat others with due respect, as they wish to be treated themselves, will take into account the needs and expectations of the evaluators and of the evaluated, such as needs concerning time, communication, work complexity or costs involved.
9. Are **open to new initiatives**, responding to local or regional social change and to the needs of their services' beneficiaries. They facilitate, as much as possible, professional managerial and ethic competition among the institutions and programmes subject to the internal or external evaluation process. Their whole activity is based on an open and participative attitude.
10. Promote **dialogue**, adequately assess the various points of view of the parties involved and try to **harmonize** them by promoting personal dedication and team spirit.

11. Are loyal to the principle of **confidentiality** when supplying, completing, using and assuring access to information in compliance with the accepted rules and procedures. They act discreetly and protect personal and intellectual property data in the activities of self-evaluation, external evaluation and accreditation.

In the process of external evaluation and/or accreditation, the information is posted, disseminated or published only after the ARACIS Council adopts and approves an official declaration or position, after clearly defining the scope of public information and only keeping with the confidentiality requirements previously settled and assumed together with this **Code**, by signing the **Commitment** of adherence to the ethics and confidentiality principles and rules as stipulated in the “Code of professional ethics in the evaluation activities for the authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance in the field of higher education in Romania”, an integrant part of this **Code**.

B. RULES OF CONDUCT

In the spirit of these values and principles, the people aimed at by this **Code** observe the following rules of conduct in their activity:

1. Conflicts of interests

The cases of conflicts of interests result from situations of incompatibility regarding the members of the ARACIS Council, the Advisory Board, evaluators and external collaborators of ARACIS, permanent employees of ARACIS, Council’s invited member students or participants in evaluations, members of higher education institutions involved in institutional self-evaluation. Such persons are in a situation of incompatibility when:

- They are a signatory or co-signatory to the documents, programs and other academic or managerial products of the assessed institution;
- They have participated directly or indirectly in the decisions regarding the evaluation of the academic and managerial performances at issue;
- They are a part of the institution which is about to be evaluated or they are directly or indirectly involved in the evaluated activity;
- They are graduates of a study programme within the evaluated institution;
- They have or used to have relations of academic service provision for the evaluated institution;
- They are related to persons in the institution or directly involved in the programs/activities under evaluation;
- They are related to one or several members of the evaluation commission appointed by ARACIS or, on the contrary, are engaged in a well-known personal conflict with one or more of its members;
- They have been involved in a dispute with the evaluated (course coordinator or somebody in the management of the institution) or have, on previous occasions, taken sides, used double standards and proved they have preconceived ideas in the evaluation of their activities;
- They have gained any kind of advantage or benefit from the evaluated (in kind or of a different nature) for themselves, their family, friends or organization they are part of.

Taking into consideration these recommendations, the people involved will announce any instance of conflict of interests which influences the impartiality and objectivity of the activity.

Those involved in a conflict of interests will previously announce the ARACIS management, shall avoid assuming any responsibility within the external evaluation process and will abstain from expressing their personal opinions and will, under no circumstance, participate in the external evaluation or accreditation procedures.

2. Gains and advantages

Under no circumstance are the persons involved in external evaluation to use their position or function in order to gain personal or institutional advantages (in kind or of a different nature). They must vigorously reject such offers. Higher education institutions will make no pressure upon the external evaluators; they will promote an ethic climate during the activities of quality evaluation and accreditation.

3. Team spirit and intellectual freedom

The people involved in quality assurance and accreditation will observe and encourage freedom of thought and of speech, and will not influence the opinions of other members involved in the external evaluation process other than by reasonable arguments. The decision needs to be democratic, based on cooperation, extensive participation and consensus obtained by previous mediation. The higher education institutions undergoing a process of quality evaluation and accreditation will have various possibilities to freely express their opinions on the quality standards employed, the decisions and recommendations made during the whole external evaluation.

The suggestions made will be taken into consideration by the respective higher education institutions and by the ARACIS Council with a view to improving future practice.

Collaboration, team spirit, consensus and intellectual freedom will be subsumed in the principle of academic autonomy and assumption of a minimum acceptable risk inherent to any process of internal or external evaluation.

4. Intellectual property

During self-evaluation and external evaluation, intellectual property of the persons providing information and documents must be permanently respected. The self-evaluation reports, reviewed documents and requests or applications submitted are entirely or partially the exclusive intellectual property of the applicant (individual or institution). Permanent employees of ARACIS, external evaluators, members of specialty commissions or of the Council, shall avoid the transmission of information and/or documents to any third party.

5. Continuous professional development

The persons involved in quality assurance must permanently improve their professional, managerial and ethic competences linked to the responsibilities resulting from the activities of quality evaluation and accreditation in higher education. They must be abreast of the national and international evolutions in the respective field. They must share their knowledge and experience with other interested colleagues. They must contribute to the increase of the awareness and acceptance of quality standards in the society. They must support all the activities and events which promote a quality and ethics culture in higher education.

6. Work quality

The persons involved in quality assurance and accreditation activities will strive towards excellence in their work. They will give special attention in order to contribute and ensure:

- exhaustiveness;

- intellectual honesty and correctness;
- trustworthy and fair evaluations;
- efficiency of the work of the evaluation agency, committee, commission or team they are part of or which assesses them;
- well-grounded statements and explanations;
- observance of the specific terms stipulated in the regulations and procedures.

7. Communication quality

The persons involved in quality assurance and accreditation activities will cooperate in order to permanently assure efficient communication among each other and with other institutions or persons (private companies, mass media). The key to the successful completion of this desideratum is the communication quality – a good operation of communication channels both vertically and horizontally, the correct, concise, constructive and complete use of clear messages, which are understood and accepted by the parties, transmitted in due time and observed by all participants. The well-argued informational essence of communication will overcome the obstacles of subjectivity and will bring trust, credibility and mutual respect. The conclusions of the evaluation will have a constructive character and will suggest guidelines to be followed for the future quality improvement programs. The confidentiality conditions and other values stipulated in this **Code** will be communicated at the beginning of each collaboration.

During the talks and mediations between the parties, communication will be based on mutual understanding, seeking convergence of opinions, harmony and consensus, with the final goal of improving the quality of educational activity for everyone's benefit.

8. Mutual trust/respect

The entire process of self-evaluation and external evaluation must be built on systematically developed mutual trust and respect. Observing and supervising the above-mentioned values, principles and rules of conduct can contribute to strengthening this trust.

C. INFRINGEMENTS OF ETHICS

The following acts and attitudes will be considered infringements of the code of ethics' principles:

1. Non-observance of the laws and legal regulations in the domain of quality evaluation and accreditation;
2. Non-observance of the procedural rules, professional principles and guidelines regarding self-evaluation and evaluation, as well as of other relevant resolutions;
3. Failure to report a conflict of interests, expression of an opinion in a case of conflict of interests, any kind of involvement or participation in procedures involving a conflict of interests;
4. Distortion of truth concerning ARACIS' activity;
5. Belonging to an agency competing with ARACIS or providing competing activities to the detriment of ARACIS' interests;
6. Using the affiliation to a certain institution, ARACIS or third party or using a certain position with a view to gaining personal or institutional advantages in kind or of another nature;
7. Disclosure of information on a certain case of quality evaluation or accreditation before the publication of an official position by the respective institution or by the

- agency, as well as disclosure at any time of confidential content of the discussions within the institutional self-evaluation or external evaluation committees, or within the evaluation and/or accreditation reports;
8. Violation of intellectual property rights;
 9. Failure to cooperate with other members, obstruction of cooperation among members involved in the process;
 10. Intimidation or any kind of visible pressure (bribe, threats) or less visible pressure (blackmail, influence peddling/interventions) put on the evaluators, members of the ARACIS Council, with a view to influencing self-evaluation, external evaluation or accreditation of a higher education institution.
 11. Defectively carrying out the evaluation mission received.

IV. Structures and mechanisms of enforcement

Acceptance of participation in the quality assurance and accreditation activity implies that everyone involved **knows** and **assumes** this **Code**. At the same time, adequate mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the **Code** are established.

j) Structures

The *permanent Commission of ethics and moral integrity* (CEIM), attached to the ARACIS Council, is created. The Commission will have the following tasks:

- To monitor the use of the **Code**;
- To receive, investigate and solve the cases of infringement of ethics and incompatibility;
- To mediate the disputes between ARACIS and the institutions subject to external evaluation;
- To draw up annual activity reports regarding the ethic and moral conduct of ARACIS and of the institutions involved in the external quality evaluation and accreditation process in Romania, and to issue improvement recommendations;
- To efficiently and consistently cooperate with the ethic commissions of higher education institutions and with the Council of academic ethics established within the Ministry of Education and Research to deal with specific issues of ethic conduct in the field of quality assurance and accreditation in the Romanian higher education.

The permanent Commission will be composed of three members, i.e. **a chairman and two members**. A secretariat will manage the documents, correspondence and draw up the minutes of the meetings.

The chairman of CEIM is a member of the ARACIS Council and is elected by open vote for a 3-year period. The other two CEIM members will be elected, one from among the members of the ARACIS Council upon recommendation of the ARACIS Council Board, by open vote, and the other from among permanent employees of ARACIS. In the process of investigation of a certain case of ethics, incompatibility or mediation of a dispute occurred, CEIM shall also co-opt a student, delegated by the students' representative in the ARACIS Council. In situations of incompatibility, the CEIM chairman shall propose to the ARACIS Council Board the temporary replacement of the commission members so as to avoid cases of incompatibility. The following cannot be a part of CEIM:

- Directly involved persons and persons against whom the respective incompatibility case has been opened;
- Persons in situations of conflict of interests in the respective case;

If the CEIM chairman is in a situation of conflict of interests in a certain case, the ARACIS Council will decide the nomination of another chairman only for that case.

ii) Mechanisms of analysis and decision

Mechanisms of analysis and decision will be initiated and implemented for the following situations:

- I. Infringements of ethics within ARACIS;
- II. Disputes between ARACIS and higher education institutions;
- III. Mediations of disputes regarding institutional self-evaluation activities;
- IV. Self-notifications.

I. Infringements of ethics within ARACIS

Reception of notification

Upon a notification or any suspicion of infringement of ethics (bribe or attempted bribe, favouritism, nepotism, subjectivism, conflict of interests, information deficit etc.) an analysis and decision procedure may be initiated by any member of the ARACIS Council or of the advisory board, by an evaluator or external collaborator of ARACIS, or by a representative of the higher education institution. The notification is filed in writing with the CEIM chairman who demands the ARACIS Council or its Board to start the activities of analysing the infringement of the Code of ethics' rules, as well as the settlement of possible cases of incompatibility at the level of CEIM. The ARACIS Council judges by open vote on the launching of the case's settlement procedure, on the mission and composition of CEIM for the respective case, if there are incompatibilities.

Notification of the party

Within 5 days since voting the Council's decision, the defendant will be informed in writing by the CEIM Chairman on the initiation of the procedure. The notice will include the accusation, the endorsing documentation and the members of the dispute settlement commission. The person concerned has the right to request in writing, within 5 days since reception of the notification, the dismissal of a member of the commission provided they bring solid arguments. If this is approved by ARACIS Council, another member will be appointed in the CEIM to investigate the case, and the defendant will receive another written notification thereof. Furthermore, the person suspected of infringement of ethics has the right to express their opinions in front of the CEIM, being announced at least 5 days before the first meeting established. If the person concerned requests the postponement of the hearing 3 days before the set date, a new date will be established. The person will be informed in writing on the consequences of their absence from the scheduled meeting.

Case analysis

The procedure will be conducted by the CEIM chairman. CEIM will meet whenever it is necessary, at ARACIS' headquarters and/or the concerned institution's headquarters, to investigate a situation, but at least once. The meetings will be initiated by the Chairman and all the CEIM members must attend them. Requesting and receiving ARACIS Council's approval, CEIM can, depending on the case, during the investigation, suspend the activity of the persons involved in the investigated case. CEIM can hear any person who can provide information necessary for the settlement of the case. Discussions during the hearings will be friendly and

confidential, aiming at the mediation and amiable negotiation of conflicts. The discussions will be written down and their minutes will be countersigned by the CEIM chairman. The proposals of the CEIM will be made on the basis of the documents made available during the hearings and of the opinions expressed by the commission members. The proposed resolution will be subject to the majority vote of the CEIM.

Resolutions

Upon recommendation of the CEIM, the ARACIS Council can adopt the following resolutions:

- Prescription of a sanction for infringement of ethics;
- Termination of the procedure if there is evidence that no violation has been committed or if the agency is not competent to decide in the matter.

The sanctions that may be given by the ARACIS Council are the following:

- Written warning;
- Temporary dismissal of the guilty person from the evaluation activities, if he/she is a member of the independent evaluators' register;
- Dismissal from the position of member/evaluator/collaborator. This can happen after repeated or serious violation of the **Code's** principles.
- Decrease of salary on a determined period, if the guilty person is a permanent employee of ARACIS;
- Cancellation of the labour contract for the permanent employees of ARACIS in case of repeated or serious violation of the **Code's** principles.

The draft resolution drawn up by the CEIM is submitted by the CEIM chairman to the ARACIS Council for approval. The Council discusses upon it and decides by open vote. The persons involved may not vote and will not attend the vote. In case of written warning, CEIM will publish it within or outside the institution, as the case may be. The person concerned will be notified about the final resolution in writing by the CEIM chairman.

Appeal

If the sanctioned person disagrees with the resolution, he/she can exercise the right to appeal within five days since reception of the sanctioning decision. In this case, the ARACIS Council or its Board may decide either to continue the hearings or to maintain the initial resolution. The opinions expressed will be attached to the final resolution which will be made public.

II. Disputes between ARACIS and higher education institutions

During the external evaluation a higher education institution can:

- signal incompatibilities, conflicts of interests (in this situation the procedure under I. applies)
- dispute the result of the external quality evaluation or of the accreditation request.

In this case:

Reception

Will follow the same stages as in case I. The notification may be submitted within maximum 5 days since the date of the events at issue.

Notification

Will follow the same stages as in case I. At the CEIM chairman's proposal, its composition shall be completed by a member of the ARACIS advisory Commission. The institution concerned will be informed on the CEIM members and has the right to demand in writing, with solid arguments, the dismissal of a member. If the ARACIS Council approves of this, another member will be appointed in the CEIM to investigate and solve the case.

Dispute analysis

The dispute analysis will be carried out, as the case may be, at the headquarters of ARACIS or of the petitioning education institution, within maximum 30 days since initiation of the procedure, by consulting the documents and hearing any person who can provide information related to the case. The analysis and discussions shall be carried out in compliance with this **Code**. They are friendly, confidential, constructive, based as much as possible on objective data and documents. Their purpose is the clarification or reconsideration of the quality evaluation from the perspective of the need of everyone involved for the permanent quality improvement in higher education.

Resolutions

Upon recommendation of the CEIM, the ARACIS Council can adopt one of the following resolutions:

i) Founded notification, in which case CEIM can ask the ARACIS Council:

- The renewed analysis of the external evaluation or accreditation file by a new evaluation commission appointed by the Council;
- The annulment of the external evaluation or recommendation of non-accreditation, and the appointment of a new commission for a new round of evaluation. According to the irregularities found, the CEIM can ask the ARACIS Council to:
 - discuss in plenum upon the proved professional and ethic misconduct;
 - sanction the persons involved verbally or in writing;
 - annul the collaboration with the person(s) involved.

ii) Unfounded notification, in which case the respective institution will be informed in writing that the notification has not been taken into consideration, specifying the reasons.

Notification

The institution concerned will be notified about the ARACIS Council's resolution in writing, within three days since its adoption by the CEIM chairman. It will contain the main arguments in its favour.

Appeal

As in I. The final result will be made public.

III. Mediations in disputes regarding institutional self-evaluation activities

A higher education institution in which a dispute caused by ethic and moral problems occurred within the institutional self-evaluation, which cannot be amiably solved, out of various reasons, within that institution or with the support of the Council for academic ethics within the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, can ask in writing for consultancy and mediation from the CEIM chairman. He will appoint the commission and will obtain the approval of the ARACIS Council for the initiation of the consultancy and mediation

procedure. CEIM will invite to discussions and negotiations any person considered important for the clarification and solution of the respective case. CEIM will mediate the dialogue with professionalism, responsibility and diplomacy, and will try to obtain the agreement of the majority of everyone involved, in order to complete the case in the best conditions.

IV. Self-notifications

CEIM can react to any case of infringement of ethics occurred in the self-evaluation and external evaluation activities, and can propose to the ARACIS Council the initiation of an analysis procedure of the respective case. The procedure will follow the stages I, II, III, as the case may be.

COMMITMENT

of compliance with the principles and regulations of ethics and confidentiality as they are stipulated in the "Code of professional ethics in the evaluation activities for the authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance in the field of higher education in Romania"

The undersigned:

Address:

Phone:

E-mail:

Institution:.....

.....

Position:

As

Hereby declare that during all the activities carried out for and on behalf of ARACIS, in which I am directly or indirectly involved, I shall fully observe the principles and rules of confidentiality as they are stipulated in the "**Code of professional ethics in the evaluation activities for the authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance in the field of higher education in Romania**". I agree that, in case I am proved to carry out activities for competing agencies, I should lose the position occupied within ARACIS.

Signature:

Date:

STATEMENT/COMMITMENT

In order to avoid conflicts of interests

(shall be filled in and signed in September each year by all Council members and evaluators of ARACIS)

The undersigned Prof./Reader, Ph.D., with basic teaching load at (the accredited higher education institution), declare the following:

- during the past 3 (three) academic years (including the current academic year) have had the quality of associated teaching staff at the following higher education institutions:

.....
.....
.....
.....;

- for the following academic year I have expressed my agreement/availability (by means of a written document or any other form) to act as teaching staff (regardless of the type of employment) at the following higher education institutions:

.....
.....
.....

I undertake to fully and clearly observe and apply the provisions stipulated in the "External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS", as well as in all other documents (Guides etc.) used in the process of quality evaluation and assurance in higher education. I understand to promote and apply these provisions in my activity, at the institution(s) where I carry out my teaching activity, with the basic teaching load and/or as associate professor, as well as at the institutions where I will be appointed as ARACIS evaluator.

At the same time, I undertake to propose to ARACIS, as the case may be, measures of improving the "Methodology" and the other documents, resulted from my evaluator expertise, without making any unfavourable comments upon their provisions in the relations with persons within the evaluated higher education institutions or within the proper institution.

By signing this statement/commitment, I undertake not to participate in the evaluations carried out in higher education institutions where I developed teaching activities within the past 3 (three) academic years or where I undertook to develop such activities in the following academic year, nor in the adoption of the Commissions' or Council' decisions related to them.

I hereby agree that, in case of non-observance of this commitment, I should be considered incompatible with the quality evaluation procedures promoted by ARACIS and, consequently, expunged from the Agency's Experts Register.

Date.

.....

Signature

.....

Annex 11

List of agencies visited in the strategic project “Quality assurance in the Romanian higher education in European context. Development of academic quality management at system and institutional level” managed by ARACIS:

1. France (05-11.04.2010)

AERES - Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education (Paris) and **CTI** - Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (Neuilly-sur-Seine);

2. Finland, Norway and Sweden (20-26.09.2010)

FINHEEC - Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (Helsinki), **NOKUT** - Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (Oslo) and **NAHE** - National Agency for Higher Education (Stockholm);

3. Spain (21-27.02.2011)

ANECA - National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (Madrid) and **AQU** - Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (Barcelona).

Annex 12

Modifications of the Guide – Part III:

14. Settlement of appeals proceedings

14.1. Relation with the university

The Agency makes every effort to have with each evaluated university a close and constructive relationship, based on systematic and continuous communication between institutions. To this end, after the evaluation visit, the *mission director* sends to the evaluated university a letter containing the preliminary results of the institutional evaluation, so that it can submit in writing any comments and suggestions to correct data that were either misunderstood or inadequately taken.

Since the data used in the arguments of the Agency's report are public and were provided by the institution in writing in the self-evaluation report, during the evaluation visit, as well as in the letter of reply to the letter sent by the mission director, the elements that may be appealed are only how the external evaluation process was conducted, for procedural flaws or for reasons related to the observance of ethics rules. The ratings and approvals proposed have the character of approvals issued by an agency specialized in quality assurance in higher education and can only be corrected by the agency concerned or possibly by another agency with the same competence and status, based on the same documents and proceedings which were the basis of the initially given qualification or approval.

After publication of the *Agency's External institutional evaluation report* on ARACIS website, if the institution considers that there are reasons of the type mentioned above, it may make an appeal in writing against the rating given by the agency, *within maximum two weeks since its publication*, by means of a letter registered to the agency within the mentioned date.

Usually, not later than 30 days since receipt of the appeal, as specified in paragraph 14.2, the **ARACIS Council's Executive Board** reviews the report and invites the university rector and the contact person for a discussion of clarification. If after discussion, the university representatives consider that the agency's report is based on real and documented evidence, the appeal may be withdrawn in writing and the *Agency's External institutional evaluation report* published on the website shall be deemed approved in its original form.

If after this discussion, the university representatives maintain their appeal or if they do not wish to participate in the discussion, the appeal is settled in accordance with paragraph 14.3. If an appeal is received, the duration of the evaluation period is extended by right for the necessary period to resolve the appeal.

After completion of the appeal settlement proceedings and approval by the Council, the Council's President announces the university, by means of an official letter, about the result of the appeal's settlement and the agency publishes on its website a notice about how it was settled.

14.2. Receipt of appeals

All appeals which are taken into account for analysis and settlement must be signed by the head of the institution (rector) and be submitted in writing to the agency's registry within the date specified at paragraph 14.1. Within maximum three days since publication on the agency's website of the evaluation results, ARACIS sends an *Information letter* to the university stating that they are available on website.

Appeals filed to ARACIS after the end of this period or those submitted to other institutions, which then send them to the agency for settlement, are not taken into account.

14.3. Settlement of appeals

Appeals are reviewed by **ARACIS Council's Executive Board** which specifies the nature of the appeal respectively classifies it within one of the categories *Appeals relating to procedural flaws* or *Appeals relating to issues of*

ethics, and appoints a speciality inspector to make a preliminary analysis of the file.

The speciality inspector examines the appeal and the evaluation-related documents and draws up a report stating whether the appeal is based on reasons that have been reported in the visit records or in the institution's letter of reply to the letter sent after the visit by the mission director but, either they were not taken into consideration by the Speciality department, either the Speciality department has considered them unfounded for reasons contained in the respective department's Report.

ARACIS Council's Executive Board examines the speciality inspector's report and takes the following decisions:

- if it is ascertained that the reasons contained in the appeal were not reported in the institution's letter or are not mentioned per se in the visit records, the **ARACIS Council's Executive Board** proposes to the Council the *rejection of appeal*;
- if these reasons were reported by the institution before the Council's decision on the final ratings, for the institution or for the evaluated study programmes within the institutional evaluation, and the Speciality department's report does not include elements that relate to these reasons, the **ARACIS Council's Executive Board** proposes the *appointment of an appeal settlement commission*.

Complaints relating to procedural flaws, claiming the breach of the provisions contained in the *Methodology* or *Guide*.

Method of settlement.

1. The **ARACIS Council's Executive Board** appoints *an appeal settlement technical Commission* consisting of three persons, namely a Board representative, an Advisory commission representative and a representative of the Department of inspectors and experts, usually the head of this department who verifies at ARACIS, based on the evaluation documents, whether the procedural flaws reported in the appeal are real or not. After that, he draws up a report.

2. If the *appeal settlement technical Commission* finds that the procedural flaws alleged in the appeal are not real, the commission will propose to the Council to reject the appeal as unfounded. If this commission finds that the reported procedural flaws are real, it will propose to the Council to resume the evaluation procedures in order to correct the issues raised, without the university having to bear further evaluation costs, which are covered by agency.
3. For the re-evaluation activities, the Council approves, upon proposal of the **ARACIS Council's Executive Board**, the nominal composition of an *additional appeal settlement Commission* formed, according to the nature of the disputed issues, of two evaluation experts and a representative of the Department of inspectors and experts, who may carry out a further visit to the university, only for verifying aspects that cannot be clarified in the documents available. After completion of the re-evaluation proceedings, the additional appeal settlement Commission's proposal shall be submitted for approval by the Council.
4. The Council examines the proposals received after the procedures previously specified and approves them by secret ballot.

Appeals relating to issues of ethics, claiming the breach of the Code of professional ethics in evaluation activities for the authorization, accreditation and quality assurance in the Romanian higher education.

Method of settlement.

1. The appeal shall be settled in compliance with the provisions of Section IV, paragraph II of the code, noting that the appeal must contain the proof of the fact that the notification was made within five days since the date of the events considered as violations of the code of ethics.
2. If the alleged violations of the code of ethics alleged in the appeal are found not to be sustained by evidence, the Commission of Ethics and Moral Integrity or the evaluation commission designated by ARACIS Council proposes to the Council to reject the appeal as unfounded. If it is ascertained that the reported violations of the code of ethics are supported by evidence, the Council may order the resumption of

evaluation procedures in order to correct the issues raised, without the university having to bear further evaluation costs, which are covered by the agency.

3. The Council examines the proposals received after the procedures previously specified and approves them by secret ballot.

14.4. Completion of appeals

Within maximum five working days from the date of the Council's meeting that approved the appeal settlement results, which are considered final, the agency publishes on its website the appeal's content, as well as a notice on the settlement result and how it was resolved.



*AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR
THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION
Full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ENQA
Listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR
12 Spiru Haret Street, sector 1, Bucharest, Romania*

ANNEX 13

**GENERAL PRESENTATION OF ARACIS' INTERNAL
QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**

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PRESENTATION OF ARACIS

The mission of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is to ensure the achievement of the public interest for qualitative standards in the carrying on of programmes of study and in the acquiring of qualifications in higher education, in order to sustain the constant improvement of quality management according to the "Bologna Process".

ARACIS is an autonomous and independent public institution, of national interest, having a legal personality and its own income and expenditure budget. The agency is not submitted to political or any other types of interference. According to the legal provisions, ARACIS is funded as follows:

- income from service contracts for quality evaluation, concluded with universities or the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports (MERYS) the fees for evaluation of study programmes or at institutional level are inclusive;
- quality external evaluation fees, established by ARACIS and approved by Government decision;
- external non-reimbursable funds obtained by participation in international programmes, donations, sponsorships, other legally established sources.

ARACIS carries out the quality external evaluation of education provided by higher education institutions and by other organisations providing higher education study programmes, which operate in Romania with the aim of:

- evaluating, according to quality standards, the capacity of education providing organisations to fulfil the beneficiaries' expectations;
- contributing to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality;
- assuring the protection of direct beneficiaries of study programmes at higher education level, by disseminating systematic, coherent, credible, publicly available information about the quality of education provided by various higher education institutions;
- proposing to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports strategies and policies of permanently enhancing higher education quality, in close correlation with pre-university education.

Given ARACIS' mission and role in the processes of evaluation, authorisation and accreditation of the Romanian higher education institutions and study programmes, ARACIS' specific tasks were formulated, in the field of accreditation and quality assurance of educational processes, which support training in the education providing organisations.

2. ARACIS' INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

In order to increase the level of knowledge, by the persons concerned, of the Quality Management System implemented within the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, it is described in this quality manual.

The basic services within the agency are the development of specific standards, methodologies and procedures, necessary for the evaluation, authorisation and accreditation of institutions and study programs, as well as services of external quality evaluation of processes in higher education institutions. The activities related to these services are included in the procedures and work instructions of ARACIS' Quality Assurance System.

Using the principles, documents of the Quality Assurance System, the procedures and work instructions represents a commitment within ARACIS for all activities, both at management and executive level.

The qualitative terms of activities and services are set for each process or group of activities, at their beginning, and are detailed and documented in the procedures and work instructions, as well as the record sheets related.

The Quality Assurance System is designed on the basis of the processes carried out by ARACIS. These are included in the map of processes shown in Figure 1.

The Quality Assurance System comprises three categories of basic documents that provide functionality at a quality level requested by the agency's internal and external customers.

The three categories of basic documents are:

GENERAL DOCUMENTS:

- Quality manual (presentation of ARACIS' mission, policy and processes);
- Code of professional ethics;
- ARACIS organisational chart;
- Composition of ARACIS' Council;
- Composition of permanent expert Commissions;
- Composition of the advisory Commission;
- Organisation and operation regulations.

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

- Registration of evaluation, authorisation, accreditation documents;
- Traceability of accreditation documents;
- Elaboration and inventory of job descriptions;
- Delivery / receipt of documents in order to be filed in the ARACIS archives;
- Granting and settlement activity for travel expenses;
- Registration of input/output documents;
- Planning of evaluation activities;
- Settlement of the appeals filed by the education providing organisations;
- Periodical evaluation of the employees' professional performances;
- Monitoring the implementation of measures ordered as a result of internal and external audits;
- External evaluation for the institutional accreditation.

EXTERNAL EVALUATION PROCEDURES

- External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators;
- Quality evaluation activities guide for academic study programmes and higher education institutions;
- Procedure for the external evaluation of academic quality – change of rating change of institutional rating;
- Settlement of appeals proceedings.

Formation of Quality Evaluators

Workshops/Training sessions for Internal Evaluators:

Training no. 1 - period 07-08 May, 2009: 58 participants from 8 universities.

Training no. 2 –period 14 - 15 May, 2009: 59 participants from 8 universities.

Training no. 3 – period 11 - 12 February, 2010: about 70 participants from 7 universities.

Training no. 4 -period 18 - 19 February, 2010 - 70 participants from 6 universities.

Training no. 5 – period 02 – 03 December, 2010 - about 75 participants from 15 universities.

Formation of Quality External Evaluators (project “Quality assurance in the Romanian higher education in European context. Development of academic quality management at system and institutional level”):

Before June 2009

Training no. 1 for formation of External Evaluators/Scientific Secretaries (support staff)

- Period: January 08, 2009 and January 22, 2009
- Number of participants: 23 participants
- Location: ARACIS - Bucharest

Training no. 2 for formation of External Evaluators / UNSR students

- Period: February 28, 2009 – March 1, 2009
- Number of participants: 23 participants
- Location: “Polytechnic” University of Bucharest

Training no. 3 for formation of External Evaluators / ANOSR students

- Period: April 02-03, 2009
- Number of participants: 22 participants
- Location: “Transilvania” University of Brasov

After June 2009

Training no. 1 for formation of External Evaluators

- Period: October 08-09, 2009

- Number of participants: 22 participants
- Location: ARACIS - Bucharest

Training Sessions no. 2/3/4 for formation of ID external evaluators

- Period: March 11-13, 2010
- Number of participants: 75 participants
- Location: "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Training no. 5 for formation of External Evaluators / UNSR students

- Period: May 09-14, 2010
- Number of participants: 29 participants
- Location: "Polytechnic" University of Bucharest

Training no. 6 for formation of External Evaluators / ANOSR students

- Period: May 16-21, 2010
- Number of participants: 24 participants
- Location: "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați

Training no. 7 for formation of external evaluators, representatives of employers

- Period: July 01 – 03, 2010
- Number of participants: 30 participants
- Location: "Ovidius" University of Constanța

Training no. 8 for formation of external evaluators

- Period: January 26-28, 2011
- Number of participants: 50 participants
- Location: "Transilvania" University of Brasov