

METHODOLOGY
for external evaluation,
standards, standards of reference and the list of
performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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ABBREVIATIONS

- NQA – National Qualifications Authority (Romanian acronym: ANC – Autoritatea Nationala pentru Calificari)
- ARACIS - Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- CQEA - Commission for Quality Evaluation and Assurance (Romanian acronym: CEAC – Comisia pentru Evaluarea si Asigurarea Calitatii)
- NCAEA – National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (in Romanian: CNEAA – Consiliul National de Evaluare si Acreditare Academica)
- NCFHE – National Council for Financing Higher Education (Romanian acronym: CNFIS – Consiliul National pentru Finantarea Invatamantului Superior)
- ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
- ESG – European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- ECTS - Transferable credits
- HEI - Higher Education Institution, generic term for an education provider authorized to operate provisionally/university/academia/institute/school or other equivalents
- MDAI - Master's Degree Awarding Institutions (Romanian acronym: IOSUM – Institutie Organizatoare de Studii Universitare de Masterat)
- DDAI - Doctoral Degree awarding institutions (Romanian acronym: IOSUD - Institutie Organizatoare de Studii Universitare de Doctorat)
- PI - Performance indicator (Romanian acronym: IP – Indicator de performanta)
- ISBN – International Standard Book Number, an international code for identifying books
- ISSN – International Standard Serial Number, an international code for identifying serial publications
- MoNE – Ministry of National Education (Romanian acronym: MEN – Ministerul Educatiei Nationale)
- Min. - Minimum acceptable level for achieving standards and performance indicators
- Ref. - Maximum identifiable level for achieving standards and performance indicators
- NRE - National Register of Evaluators (Romanian acronym: Registrul National al Evaluatorilor)
- S - Performance Standard
- EHEA - European Higher Education Area
- NHES - National Higher Education System
- SWOT Analysis - Analysis that helps identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

INTRODUCTION

The methodology for external evaluation, the standards, standards of reference and the list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, hereinafter named **the Methodology**, concretizes the provisions of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on quality assurance in education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended.

The methodology applies for:

- a) the provisional authorization to operate of new Licence (*1st Cycle*) /Master (*2nd Cycle*) Degree¹ study programs initiated and proposed by accredited higher education institutions;
- b) the provisional authorization to operate for higher education providers which initiate Licence Degree study programs and for the Licence/Master Degree study programs they initiate;
- c) the accreditation of Master Degree awarding institutions (MDAI) and of the Master studies fields (*domains*);
- d) the periodic evaluation of the accredited higher education institutions, of the accredited study programs and of the master studies fields (*domains*);.

The evaluation of the third cycle of university studies, organized in doctoral studies, shall be conducted in compliance with a specific distinct procedure which will be drafted in compliance with the regulations in force.

The Methodology provides the conceptual framework and describes the main activities and strategies provided by the processes of periodic authorization, respectively of external quality assurance. The operational and instrumental aspects are detailed in the **Specific evaluation Guide**, hereinafter named the **ARACIS Guide** or **the Guide**, drafted by ARACIS in cooperation with the higher education institutions and with other stakeholders and beneficiaries. The Guide shall be approved by the ARACIS Council. Depending on the evolution of quality assurance requirements in higher education, the ARACIS Council may approve the modification and amendment of the Guide.

ARACIS is a body with legal prerogatives to issue and to propose to the Ministry of National Education advises and recommendations based on its own evaluations, which concretize the knowledge/experience in the field, and therefore the ARACIS Guide and its annexes are recognized in Romania as specific norms and regulations in the field of quality assurance in higher education. The ARACIS Methodology and Guide provide the compliance with the ESG – European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, hereinafter named ESG, approved in 2015 in the Yerevan conference by ministers in charge with higher education of the European Higher Education Area, that explicitly define the activities, policies and processes of quality assurance.

ARACIS may conduct external quality evaluation based on contracts signed with beneficiaries in the European Higher Education Area, hereinafter named EHEA, or from countries outside the EHEA, under activities of cooperation or international partnerships. For

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

the evaluation of the quality of education provided by education providers which operate on the territory of another state, the ARACIS **Methodology** and Guide can be adapted to specific local conditions, subject to the approval of the ARACIS Council, so as to comply with the legal provisions in these states, while complying with the standards established under the ESG 2015 for EHEA.

The Methodology is intended for:

- a) representatives of Romanian education providers and higher education institutions - HEIs - rectors and vice-rectors, deans and vice-deans, heads of departments, members of academic communities made up of students, academics, scientific researchers and administrative staff - namely all those whose activities contribute to shaping and developing the academic quality;
- b) commissions and other structures directly responsible for quality management in HEIs or with the external evaluation of quality;
- c) higher education beneficiaries, namely students, employers and, in a broader sense, society as a whole.

The Methodology uses the terminology and the concepts established under the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as further amended, and will be further developed by ARACIS, in compliance with the legal provisions, in order to strengthen its practical nature and better serve the beneficiaries in connection with the activities carried out by HEIs and their concrete requirements. In this respect, ARACIS closely cooperates with all interested HEIs, with the Ministry of National Education, as well as with representatives of students, trade unions, and employers. The transparency of the information and decisions will be ensured so that the public can follow the development of the system of quality assurance in the Romanian higher education, as part of the EHEA.

Moreover, ARACIS contributes in quality assurance in education by conducting thematic analyses, concretized by publishing regular reports that describe and analyze the general results of the external quality assurance activities.

PART I: PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The changes that have taken place in the Romanian higher education, as well as all over Europe and in other parts of the world, have been equally numerous, radical and continuous. At the beginning of the 90s, the first private HEIs were established in Romania, and the number of the public HEIs and of new study programs/specializations has grown rapidly. As a result of these developments, the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (NCAEA) was created. Between 1993 and 2006, NCAEA conducted activities of evaluation, accreditation of institutions and of study programs.

The national higher education system has further undergone other significant transformations; following the signing of the Bologna Declaration, in 1999, by European education ministers, Romania became a member of the Bologna Process, aimed to create the European Higher Education Area by 2010, through a series of changes and transformations. These changes continue to take place following the decisions taken in the ministerial conferences that take place periodically until 2020. One of the central goals of the Bologna Process is academic quality assurance. The achievement of this goal depends on the correspondences established between the senses of academic quality and the transformations that take place in the field of higher education. Thus, quality assurance in education is an obligation that is applicable to all higher education institutions in Romania.

1.1 Transformations in higher education

In compliance with Recommendation “Rec (2007)6” of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on public responsibility for higher education and research http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/News/pub_res_EN.pdf, higher education aims, through its study programs, at achieving a series of goals, including preparing students for active citizenship, for their future careers, for instance by contributing to their employability, by supporting their personal development, by creating a wide basis of advanced knowledge by supporting research and innovation.

Out of the total number of transformations, already completed or ongoing, the **Methodology** considers, to various extents, the following aspects:

1. The diversity of higher education institutions, resulting mainly from:
 - changes in the institutional profile of traditional HEIs, especially through the diversification of study programs;
 - the coexistence of comprehensive, pluri-disciplinary HEIs and HEIs focused on a more limited number of disciplines;
 - the coexistence of organizations managing study programs provided by foreign universities in various formulas, such as transnational or borderless;
2. The multiplication of program formulae which ensure a “distributed learning”, based more on study programs and teaching staff mobility and on using information technology, in the following forms:
 - establishment of territorial branches;
 - distance learning programs, part time programs or other education forms approved

by law.

3. The increase in higher education institutions complexity and size, in terms of number of study programs and students, accompanied by certain challenges, such as:
 - the transformation of HEIs, from elitist universities into mass higher education institutions;
 - the maintenance and even strengthening of research performance requirements, while strengthening the requirements concerning teaching quality;
 - challenges in recruiting young researchers and teaching staff, due to the noncompetitive salary package;
 - profound disparities, in terms of attractiveness, between different study programs and, implicitly, between sources and levels of financing from public and extra-budgetary funds;
 - the internationalization of higher education, through the educational offer in foreign languages, attracting foreign students to university studies in Romania and by taking part in international research and education programs;
 - the challenges in identifying the labor market demands, so as to correlate learning outcomes with the expectations of a continuously growing category of employers.
4. The gap between institutional requirements, particularly in public institutions, with regard to successful academic management and certain inadequate management practices:
 - the sometimes challenging harmonization of central management with the management of faculties or departments, resulting in certain difficulties in allocating resources and in achieving objectives, which has had a negative influence on the institutional quality framework;
 - failure to provide institutional homogeneity, which may have repercussions on the institutional profile of quality.
5. Promoting best practice identified in Romanian or foreign HEIs, so as to increase academic performance;
6. The participation of Romania in the EHEA and facing globalization are increasing the competitive pressure on a constantly growing higher education market.

1.2 Fundamental Principles in Approaching Quality in Education

As these 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, on the one hand, and the approaches on quality, on the other hand, is essential.

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

The external dimension is provided under the Bologna Process, which is based on a programmatic document (the “Bologna Declaration”, 1999) adopted by all Education Ministers of the member states and under the Communiqués further signed by the Ministers in charge with higher education in the EHEA. The rigorous implementation of the list of

provisions established at European level includes the listing of the national agencies for quality assurance, ARACIS included, in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR. Moreover, the fact that Romanian HEIs are part of the European Higher Education Area provides confidence in quality and a strengthened basis for the academic/professional recognition of Romanian diplomas.

The internal dimension of academic quality builds upon the legislation in force, depending on the specificity of each HEI, and on the tradition and cultural heritage of our higher education system. This is the full responsibility of each HEI/education program provider. From this perspective, quality assurance becomes a process that is adapted to the existing institutional specificity and a mechanism for continuously improving academic performance or outcomes. Each HEI will have, mandatorily, a structure for quality assurance, as provided by the law, for drafting, monitoring and updating quality assurance policies.

The principles of reference of the **Methodology** are listed below:

1. **European reference:** the Romanian higher education system and institutions belong to the EHEA and ensure quality levels, corresponding to the requirements of this area and competitive at European and international levels. As per the Communiqué adopted in the 2015 Yerevan Conference by the Ministers in charge with higher education of the countries signing the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe, which are EHEA partners, the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance - ESG*, are applicable to the entire higher education of the EHEA, irrespective of the place or manner in which it is provided.

ESG focuses on quality assurance with respect to learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and the relevant connections with research and innovation. Moreover, institutions have policies and processes for assuring and improving their own activities, such as scientific research of institution management.

2. **Institutional responsibility:** the responsibility for and the management of quality assurance are the obligation of each HEI, in compliance with the academic autonomy and with the legislation in force.
3. **Institutional diversity:** the diversity of the institutions, of their missions and objectives is respected and encouraged by means of external evaluation of quality.
4. **Cooperation with all educational system stakeholders:** the approach, the practices applied and the forms of technical assistance provided by ARACIS are based on cooperation and mutual confidence in its relationships with higher education institutions and other partners.
5. **Focus on results:** in quality assurance and evaluation, learning outcomes and university research performance, seen as a component of the education process, are essential.
6. **Institutional identity:** learning and research outcomes and performance can be achieved through a variety of practices, methods or structures, autonomously designed and implemented by each institution, according to its own options. In this respect, ARACIS assessments focus mostly on outcomes and performances, without neglecting

the influence of best practices and successful structures in the field of academic quality.

7. **Internal institutional self-evaluation of quality:** each self-evaluation document must outline the specificity of the quality culture in the higher education institution and ensure continuous performance improvement;
8. **External evaluation:** external evaluation is based on the higher education institution proving its learning and research outcomes and performance and on the verification of their correspondence with the institutional reality, including the verification of student activity, against the standards agreed to.
9. **Quality improvement:** continuous quality and institutional management improvement is the main goal of the external evaluation.
10. **Transparency:** the results of all external evaluations are concretized in reports, which are public documents, as part of the public responsibility of ARACIS and, respectively of the HEI. The findings of the evaluation, after the complaints resolution procedures are completed, include judgments and advises, which are made public and communicated to the Ministry of National Education.

These principles are the reference framework of the ARACIS activity and of this **Methodology**. Their aim is to promote that quality culture which will consistently contribute to achieving high quality in higher education, defined as a public good, worthy of public trust, and contributing to students' personal development and achievement, as well as to the continuous improvement of the quality of life, of the national culture and 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 high quality education in the new European and international contexts.

1.3 Relationships between ARACIS and other institutions

Quality assurance in higher education is based on HEIs autonomy in formulating and achieving their own options with regard to the quality level and its management. At the same time, ARACIS and the higher education institutions together with other authorities responsible for organizing and carrying out the educational process are actively cooperating to:

1. Permanently improve quality through:
 - evaluating, revising and improving the quality criteria, standards and performance indicators, while correlating them with the qualification requirements in the field of higher education;
 - increasing the level of reference standards and of corresponding performance indicators, in each institution, in compliance with their mission;
 - the continuous use of the evaluators' experience and of the results of the mission of evaluation of institutions, study programs or fields of study;
2. Undertaking, as fully as possible, public responsibility by:
 - achieving levels of quality that meet the expectations of beneficiaries, particularly

- students and employers;
 - defining higher education as a public good;
 - ensuring a clear, consistent and coherent communication with the beneficiaries;
 - correctly informing the public with regard to the outcomes achieved and the intended improvements.
3. 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 addressing deficiencies;
 - considering actual outcomes as a reference for evaluation.

1.4 Quality Assurance and Accreditation

The main objective of ARACIS activities is to assure and improve quality. The **accreditation** is the process of assuring and improving academic quality, that takes place in two stages, through which an education provider is first provisionally authorized to operate as a higher education institution, with the right to conduct the educational process and to organize admission sessions, and then accredited and recognized as a part of the national higher education system, with the right to issue diplomas, certificates and other documents recognized at national level, and to organize graduation, Licence (*1st Cycle*), Master (*2nd Cycle*) and Doctoral (*3rd Cycle*) examinations. After the accreditation process, the HEI enters the periodic external evaluation process. Accreditation is applicable to study programs and study fields (*domains*) as well, as per the law.

The standards, standards of reference and performance indicators are the same for both quality assurance in already accredited institutions and for accrediting newly established institutions. The difference is determined by their level of achievement. With a view to authorization, accreditation and periodic evaluation, the **minimum level** of achievement of performance indicators is considered. In quality assurance, the standards of reference may be set at optimal institutional levels, above the minimum required level.

The external evaluation with a view to accreditation performed by ARACIS is aimed at:

- a) assuring the academic community, the beneficiaries and the public at large that the accredited institution satisfies the minimum quality standards of the higher education system;
- b) promoting the commitment of the institution to the continuous development of academic quality, proven by learning and research outcomes;
- c) promoting institutional standards for quality management and quality culture and demonstrating their status through relevant evidence and documents;
- d) supporting and encouraging the institution to evaluate itself and to cooperate in its external evaluation in order to assure and develop quality;
- e) working together with other higher education institutions, as well as with the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) for achieving, monitoring and comparing

academic quality;

- f) not accepting study programs of education providers which do not meet the minimum standards of academic quality.

1.5 Quality Assurance Areas (*Domains*)

Three fundamental quality assurance areas in education are 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 performance indicators are designed in this Methodology 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 commitment of the institution in achieving a certain level of performance, which can be demonstrated through effective outcomes. The role of the external evaluator, namely ARACIS, is to acknowledge and evaluate the managerial and educational capacity of the education provider, in order to be able, on this basis, to ascertain and then validate or invalidate its functioning publicly and with documentary evidence, as well as to give recommendations aimed at supporting the development of quality assurance and quality culture in the HEI.

The Quality Assurance Areas (*Domains*) are established under art. 10 of the GEO no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended. This methodology considers the following aspects:

1. Institutional Capacity: the institution is coherently organized, has an adequate management and administration system, 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 agreed mission and objectives.

2. Educational effectiveness refers to the design and organization of student-centered 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 in its mission, which should be clearly worded. The evaluation criteria for educational effectiveness refer to:

a) objectives and outcomes design:

- clear and easy to understand design;
- compliance with the aimed academic qualifications (Licence or specialization in a certain field, Master's or Doctorate) and differentiated by subject and/or study program;
- rigorous correspondence of the degree of achievement with adequate internal evaluation procedures;
- adequate assessment of the of the student workload, correlated with the educational route and success;

b) the organization of the learning framework, through:

- curricula, study programs, teaching methods that are diverse, modern and interactive, objective criteria and adequate techniques for student evaluation;
- adequate teaching staff recruitment and development;

- learning resources and facilities made available, connected with the financial activity of the organization;
 - coherent organization of the teaching, learning and student examination flows;
 - student services provided, including social services and extra-curricular activities;
 - the existence of procedures for the admission, recognition and completion of studies that are adequate for the purpose, in particular when students are mobile within or between higher education systems;
 - equity and access policies, admission procedures and criteria used, implemented adequately and transparently;
 - the existence and implementation of procedures for the integration and adaptation of students to the institution and study program.
- c) regular monitoring, evaluation and review of study programs so as to assure that:
- the educational offer remains adequate and permanently correlated with the scientific developments and with the national and international economic reality;
 - a favorable and effective learning environment is created for students, considering the social dimension of education as well;
 - the educational offer is correlated with the continuously changing demands of society;
 - the expectations, needs and level of satisfaction of students are considered, against the study program, and they are actively involved in the monitoring, evaluation and review process, alongside graduates and employers.

3. Quality Management focuses on the strategies, structures, techniques and operations through which the institution demonstrates that it evaluates its own performance in terms of education quality assurance and improvement, and has information systems in place for demonstrating its learning and research outcomes. The importance of this area consists, on the one hand, in the emphasis placed on the quality assurance approach of the institution in all its activities, and on making public the information and data that attest to a certain quality level.

The three areas are complementary, and, according to the legal provisions, their use is compulsory. To this end, any higher education institution should reach the stage where it has the mechanisms, means and information corresponding to achieving the criteria, standards and performance indicators established under this Methodology, structured by the three fields, considering its specific profile, mission and objectives. The head of the higher education institution, through the Commission for the quality evaluation and assurance - CQEA at the institution, is in charge with designing and implementing the quality strategies, structured around the three areas. Students are a fundamental partner in conducting the quality evaluation and assurance processes, in all three fields.

1.6 Terminology

This section provides the meaning associated with the main terms used in the implementation of this **Methodology**.

Education providing organization: is an education institution or other legal entity, which, according to its statute, carries out higher education activities based on legally approved study programs. According to the legislation in force, an education providing

organization undergoes the evaluation procedure, for the external evaluation of quality or, as the case may be, for obtaining the provisional authorization to operate or the accreditation of the study programs and/or its own accreditation as an education providing organization. As per the provisions of the GEO no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended, only higher education institutions that are authorized to operate provisionally or are accredited under art. 29, para. (4) letter. a) and b) and art. 35, para. (1) can use the name of university or other similar names; the accreditation of higher education institutions is conducted according to the law, approved by the Government, upon the initiative of the Ministry of National Education, based on the ARACIS advise as per art. 31, letter. g).

Study program: a study program/specialization consists of all the activities of design, organization, management, and the process of teaching, learning and research carried out in a certain field, which lead to the obtaining of an academic qualification.

Study programs are differentiated by:

- a) level of university diploma: licence (*1st Cycle*), master's (*2nd Cycle*), doctorate (*3rd Cycle*);
- b) form of education: full-time, part-time, distance learning;
- c) field of specialization of knowledge, as per the academic division of learning and with the professional division of labor;
- d) duration of studies, respectively the number of the ECTS transferable credits;
- e) language of teaching.

Study programs are concretized in:

- 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) study credits;
- b) *discipline/course program* or *syllabus* outlining: the teaching and learning themes and practices associated with teaching, learning and evaluation, as well as the recommended bibliography;
- c) *the organization of students and teaching staff* for the study program implementation period;
- d) the system of academic *quality assurance* for all activities required for carrying out the study program.

Provisional authorization to operate for study programs and/or institutions is the first stage of the accreditation procedure; it is the result of an external evaluation conducted by ARACIS, based on a self-evaluation report submitted by the applicant. The provisional authorization to operate is the document which confers the higher education institution or the education providing organization the right to carry out educational activities and organize, if necessary, admission examinations for a study program. The provisional authorization to operate for a study program is granted based on the advise of ARACIS or of another agency registered in EQAR and of the Ministry of National Education, through a Government Decision initiated by the Ministry of National Education, within maximum 90 calendar days from its submission. The provisional authorization to operate can be granted to a higher

education provider, by Government Decision, at least six months before the beginning of a new academic year, if the education providing organization has initiated at least three study programs that have been submitted and received advise for provisional authorization to operate from ARACIS or from another agency registered in the EQAR and from the Ministry of National Education, except for higher education institutions that only provide theological higher education, which may receive provisional authorization to operate if they have initiated at least one study program that has been submitted and received advise for provisional authorization to operate from ARACIS and from the Ministry of National Education.

Accreditation is the quality assurance modality that certifies the observance of standards by education providing organizations and by study programs. The accreditation is proposed and granted, based on the results of an external evaluation process carried out by ARACIS or by another agency registered in the EQAR, in recognition of the academic quality of an education providing organization/structure already provisionally authorized to operate and complies with the minimum standard requirements and performance indicators concerning the quality of education. The accreditation of a study program is granted by Government Decision initiated by the Ministry of National Education, based on ARACIS advise, within 90 calendar days from its submission. The accreditation at institutional level for an education providing organization is awarded by a Law promoted by the Government, upon the initiative of the Ministry of National Education, based on the ARACIS advise, in compliance with the legislation.

Accredited higher education institutions are integrated into the national higher education system and have the right to issue diplomas, certificates and other study documents recognized by the Ministry of National Education, and to organize graduation examinations for the completion of the Licence, Master's and/or Doctorate study programs.

Standards, Standards of Reference, and Performance Indicators describe the quality requirements for the activities of an education providing organization which applies for a provisional authorization to operate, an accredited higher education institution which applies for a provisional authorization to operate/accreditation of a new study program/field of study, or of an accredited higher education institution which applies for an external quality evaluation of the education it provides. 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 education activity. All standards are formulated in general terms, in the form of a statement, and are expressed in sets of performance indicators. Standards are differentiated by areas and criteria.

Standards of Reference are standards which define the optimal level of achievement of an activity by an education providing organization, based on existing national, European or international best practices. Standards of Reference are specific to each study program or institution, they are optional, and are set above the minimum level. The Standards of Reference can vary from one institution to another, and it is possible that, in time, institutions design their own Standards of Reference at higher and more competitive national and international levels. The option for a level of a standard of reference is made by comparison against a Standard, and, within the latter, against the optional levels of the performance

indicators.

A *Performance Indicator* is 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 authorization to operate, the accreditation of a study program or the accreditation of an institution are based on the *minimum level* of all standards and performance indicators. Failure to achieve the minimum level of a performance indicator leads to the failure to obtain the provisional authorization to operate advise. 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 drafting of Standards of Reference falls under the responsibility of the institution, based on the information provided by ARACIS with regard to the European variation of standards and performance indicators. These must be understood as the institution's own Standards of Reference, which the institution proposes and commits to in accordance with its own quality assurance strategy.

The periodic external academic evaluation is achieved for all accredited higher education structures.

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

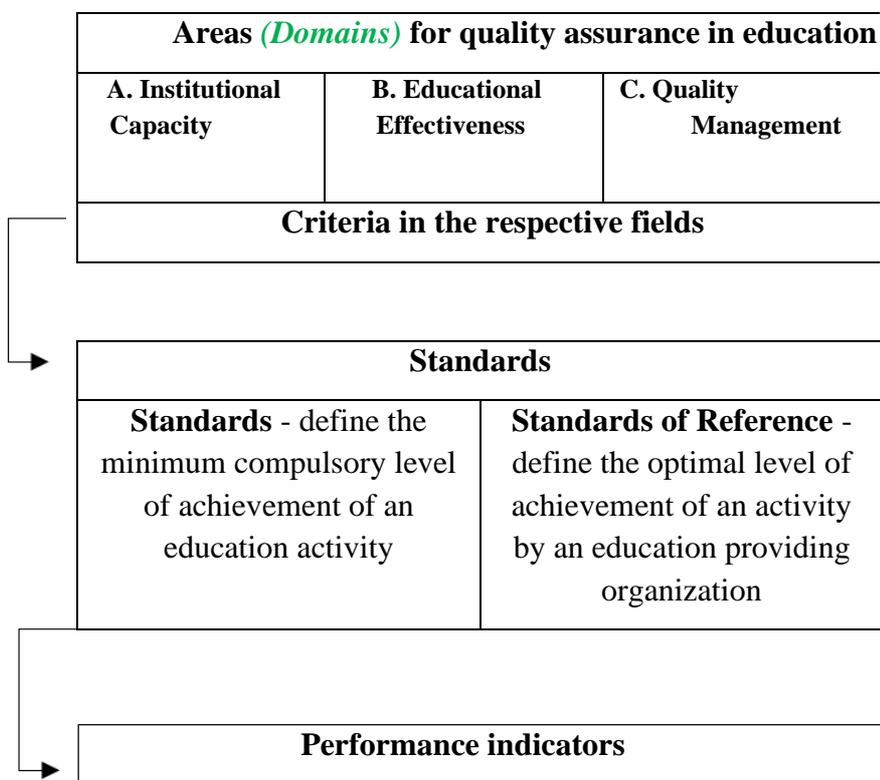
Criteria, standards and performance indicators are applied in quality assurance as part of the internal and external evaluation processes for periodic evaluation and accreditation. They are used by HEIs and ARACIS as follows:

- a) they are the basis of reference for quality management in higher education institutions;
- b) provide the framework for setting-up the databases and information bases that institutions can provide for the internal monitoring and external demonstration of the status of academic quality assurance;
- c) are used by ARACIS as part of the evaluation process and external quality assurance, with a view to periodic evaluations, accreditation and developing a quality culture.

2.1 Correlations and Relationships between Areas (*Domains*), Criteria, Standards and Performance Indicators

Correlations and relationships between areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators are shown in Figure 1.

Figure1. Correlations and relationships between areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators



Criteria refer to each of the three fundamental areas established by law and represent the fundamental aspects of the organization and functioning of an education providing organization. Each criterion has a corresponding set of standards. The role of the standards is:

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

The values of Performance Indicators vary from the minimum acceptable level, based on which the authorization or accreditation is granted or maintained, to a certain level of reference that each institution adopts independently, based on comparisons against similar Romanian or foreign institutions. Standards are defined so that they correspond, through their Performance Indicators, to the minimum acceptable level.

The levels of the Performance Indicators for the **Standards of Reference** vary by institution. In addition to the **Methodology**, ARACIS 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 provides that the standards and the minimum levels of the performance indicators associated are mandatory and comprehensive. The standards and/or values of reference in the Methodology should be seen as recommendations. HEIs should draft and adopt their own Standards of Reference, considering the information and consultancy offered by ARACIS, on a contract basis as well.

A set of Performance Indicators is associated to the Standard, in order for the latter to be implemented. Indicators are aimed at identifying 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 the experience in the field of many other HEIs in Romania and from the European Higher Education Area. All HEIs will establish their own position, within the corresponding parameters of an indicator, for a determined period (for instance the term of the elected management, i.e. 4 years; the period covered by the institutional strategic plan or, according to another option, a specific position on the variation space corresponding to an indicator). The minimum level of an indicator is the minimum required for granting the provisional authorization to operate or the accreditation status. HEIs can distinguish themselves in terms of quality through the superior values of the performance indicators achieved.

The evaluation of quality in an institution is made within the three areas (*domains*) provided under the law, based on the information corresponding to standards and performance indicators.

2.2 Areas (Domains), Criteria, Standards, Performance Indicators

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

Area A: Institutional Capacity

This area refers to the manner in which the mission and the objectives of the education provider are supported by its internal structures, its management and administration, as well as by the material resources that it can provide.

Criterion A.1 - Institutional, Administrative and Managerial Structures

The higher education institution formulates its mission and objectives in accordance with a set of reference values, reflecting the intentions of its academic community, so as to reflect its individual identity within the higher education system, and to affirm itself as an autonomous institution which produces and disseminates knowledge in accordance with the values of academic freedom and ethical integrity.

The HEI supports the activities aimed to achieve the objectives established through an adequate institutional, administrative and managerial structure.

The institution has:

- ✓ coherent and sustainable organization, as well as an adequate system of leadership and management;
- ✓ material and financial resources required for stable medium and long term functioning;
- ✓ adequate human resources for accomplishing its mission and objectives committed to.

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 values of reference. The institution can prove that it observes and upholds ethical and integrity norms, the academic freedom of its staff and students and that it operates in conditions of academic autonomy, of public responsibility and accountability for the education provided and that it has the resources required for achieving the objectives aimed at.

Performance indicators

PI.A.1.1.1. Mission and objectives

Min: The institution is established and operates according to the law. The institution has a University Charter, the provisions of which are public, in accordance with

national legislation and with the principles of the European Higher Education Area, and are known by the members of the academic community. The mission and objectives undertaken reflect the individual identity of the institution within the EHEA system through clarity, distinction and specificity.

Ref. 1: The manner in which the mission and objectives are formulated and achieved reflect the individual identity of the institution within the EHEA.

PI.A.1.1.2. Academic integrity

Min: The education provider/education institution has a Code of professional ethics/academic integrity, which defends the values of academic freedom, academic autonomy and ethical integrity, it has practices and applies clear mechanisms for assuring permanent watchfulness against any frauds in its academic activities, activities of research or of any other nature, including active measures for preventing and eliminating any forms of plagiarism, as well as promoting the ethics and integrity principles to all members of the academic community.

The education provider/education institution continuously monitors and evaluates these practices and can make proof of applying them for all activities conducted, as well as the proof of involving students in all these processes; the results of the monitoring are made public annually or whenever necessary. The code of professional ethics/academic integrity provides mechanisms and measure for assuring equal opportunities and protection against intolerance and discrimination of any kind.

Ref. 1: The education provider/education institution can make proof that applying these practices in all processes managed - management, education, research etc., has helped improve the outcomes obtained. The results of the evaluations conducted are included in the annual activity reports, which are published on the internet page of the institution.

Ref. 2: The education provider/education institution has a prevention-based policy concerning possible violations of the code of ethics and academic integrity, which is demonstrated by public stances, studies and analyses. Elements aimed at promoting student ownership in this regard are included in the curricula; the teaching staff demonstrate that they are aware of the national, European and international developments concerning the processes and techniques for countering and preventing the actions that are in breach of the academic integrity and ethics norms.

PI.A. 1.1.3. Responsibility and public accountability

Min: The institution has internal audit practices concerning the main fields of academic activity in order to ensure that its commitments are rigorously observed while ensuring public transparency. Internal auditing is conducted periodically at institution and department level, focusing on administrative, financial and accounting aspects, academic integrity, teaching and learning methodology, examination, research and student services. An academic auditing report is discussed annually in the Senate and published, and an improvement plan is drafted.

Ref. 1: The education provider/education institution makes proof of publishing the

measures established in the improvement plan and reports annually and publishes the implementation stage of the improvement measures and the results archived.

S.A.1.2 Management and administration

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

Performance indicators

PI.A. 1.2.1. Management System

Min: The institution has a management system and internal operating regulations in compliance with legal provisions in force, observing the minimum percentage of student representation in the HEI management structures, as provided by the law. The mechanism for electing student representatives for Councils, Senate and other structures is clearly outlined in the University Charter and in the internal regulations. This mechanism is democratic, transparent and nondiscriminatory, and it does not limit a students' rights to represent and to be represented.

The management structures include representatives of the economic and social environment, of the education trade unions and of other beneficiaries and partners of the university.

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, administrative staff, and other university partners and beneficiaries, 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 compliance with rigorous monitoring practices and mechanisms. The strategic plan is elaborated for long, medium and short terms, is updated annually or when required by the higher education evolutions and the context, and is consistently pursued throughout the management and administration activity and performance evaluation. The quality assurance procedure is part of the strategic management.

Ref. 1: The education provider/education institution considers the continuity of applying its mission and policies through measures aimed at connecting the current strategic plan with the long-term strategic plan, and makes proof that is acting in this regard, involving its economic and social partners, against the national and international background, including through monitoring the professional evolution of its own graduates.

PI.A. 1.2.3. Effective Administration

Min: The HEI has an administration which complies with the legislation in force, is

effective in terms of organization, staffing levels and qualifications, and functions rigorously in terms of services provided to the academic community.

Ref. 1: The HEI has an effective and rigorous administration as well as the necessary mechanisms of control and continuing improvement of the administration performance.

Ref. 2: The informatisation (*IT*) level of the administration is submitted to periodic activities/processes of modernization in order to continuously maintain it at the level of best international practices.

Criterion A.2 -Material Resources

S.A.2.1. Property, equipment, financial resources allocated, student support

The HEI has the property and resources which effectively support the implementation of the mission and objectives undertaken.

Performance indicators

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

Min: Whilst observing the differences between study forms (full-time, part-time and distance learning) as well as the objectives of the teaching, learning and research activities, the HEI provides adequate teaching and research facilities which reflect its mission (teaching rooms, laboratories and research centers in compliance with current technical and health and safety norms). The quality of these facilities is evaluated by area, volume, technical conditions, maximum number of students, number of occupants - teaching and research staff, students etc., differentiated by fields, study programs as well as institutionally, compared against national norms. The indicator also refers to the accommodation facilities and other student facilities for social, cultural and sports activities. HEI has an adequate number of accommodation places for students, providing accommodation and studying conditions in compliance with technical and health and safety norms in force.

Ref. 1: The accommodation and canteen facilities and for other support and extra-curricular student activities, such as counseling and career guidance and medical practices, are accessible to disabled persons as well.

Ref. 2: In addition to the existing facilities, the HEI has realistic development and investment plans, within forecasted income levels.

PI.A.2.1.2. Equipment

Min: Teaching/seminar rooms have technical equipment that is adequate for learning/communication, which facilitate teacher instruction and student understanding; research laboratories have equipment and means corresponding to the minimum requirements.

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

PI.A.2.1.3. Adequate financial resources for teaching and learning activities, adequate support services that are easily accessible to students

Min: The institution can prove that it has sufficient financial resources over a short term (one year) and medium term (a minimum of three/four consecutive years), to adequately fulfil the mission and objectives undertaken. The institution has a realistic annual budget and a three/four year budget, as well as short and medium term financial policies, with regards to financial sustainability. The quality assurance procedure is part of the strategic management.

The demands of a diverse population of students, such as adult students, part-time students or students enrolled in distance learning programs, students who have a job or foreign students, as well as disabled students, and the shift towards a student-centered paradigm, as well as flexible teaching and learning manners are considered in planning and allocating resources for learning and for student support services. Students are informed about the existence of the respective resources.

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

PI.A.2.1.4. System of scholarship allocation and other forms of material support for students

Min: The institution has a regulation for awarding scholarships and others forms of material support for students, which is applied in a consistent manner, in compliance with legal provisions in force. Scholarships are awarded 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 from the institution's own resources.

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

Ref. 3: The education provider/education institution provides material support to students who attend other activities, such as research programs, scientific events, student competitions, publications, cultural events etc.

IP.A.2.1.5. Administrative staff for student support services

Min: The university administrative staff is qualified for the student support activities and has opportunities to develop their skills. Staff recruitment and development processes are correct and transparent. The administrative staff schedule for working with students is published on the web page of the institution and adapted to the needs of various types of students, such as adult students.

Ref. 1: Students are periodically enquired concerning the activity of the university administrative staff, are invited to assess the activity of the staff with whom they have direct contact; following this evaluation, the HEI adopts a plan of measures for

improving these activities.

Area B: Educational Effectiveness

The institution organizes activities of student admission, of student-centered learning, teaching and assessment, starting from the objectives of the study programs and from the expected learning outcomes. Research activities and their outcomes, compared against performances in development and knowledge/technology/arts transfer are reflected in student training.

Standards (S) and performance indicators (PI)

Criterion B.1 - Content of Study Programs

S.B.1.1. Student admission

The institution designs its own student recruitment and admission policy and applies it transparently and rigorously, observing the principle of equal opportunities for all candidates, without discrimination. The institution's own rules concerning admission are previously published, in compliance with national regulations in force, and are applied in a consistent manner. The education provider/education institution makes available its own rules to the candidates, covering all study cycles.

Performance indicators

PI.B.1.1.1. Principles of admission policy to study programs provided by the institution

Min: The institution has a transparent policy for student recruitment and admission, which is publicly announced at least six months prior to implementation. University marketing disseminates 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 whatsoever. The institution undertakes to increase the quality of its admission policies.

PI.B.1.1.2. Admission practices

Min: The admission to an academic study **cycle** is allowed only based on the existence of previous diploma, taking into consideration the hierarchical order of merit at graduation.

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

Ref. 2: Admission is only based on admission examination.

Ref. 3: HEI has admission procedures adapted to student mobility.

Ref. 4: HEI has admission procedures adapted to disabled students.

S.B.1.2 Structure and range of study programs

Study programs are the center of the education mission of higher education institutions. The general objectives of study programs are in agreement with the institutional strategy. Study programs are structured and presented in a detailed manner, are designed around the expected outcomes of the learning process and correspond to a university degree. The degree resulting from a program has to be clearly specified and communicated, with reference to the corresponding level in the National Qualifications Framework, and, as a consequence, to the Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area.

Performance indicators

PI.B.1.2.1. Structure of study programs

Min: Each study program/specialization program of the university is based on correlations between expected learning outcomes, respectively research outcomes, in the case of Master's and Doctoral programs, on the one hand, and the university degree on the other hand. A study program is presented in the form of a series of documents which includes: general and specific objectives of the program; the curriculum, with the disciplines' weight expressed in ECTS study credits and disciplines distributed successively over the study period; thematic programs and syllabi expressing learning outcomes in the form of cognitive, technical or professional and emotional skills acquired through a certain subject; the examination and evaluation methods for each subject, taking into consideration the planned 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.

The study programs include, as applicable, themes that help acquire transversal skills, such as the expression of student personality as part of the society, communication, foreign languages, teamwork, European values, issues pertaining to sustainable society development, promotion of democracy, intercultural dialogue, compliance with the law, responsibilities in carrying out one's professional duties, which may influence their further development and can be applied in their future careers. The study program includes, where applicable, well-structured traineeships or job placement opportunities. The placement may include internships, traineeship activities or other parts of the program which do not take place in the institution, but which allow students to gain experience in the fields.

Ref. 1: Each study program is presented according to the stated standard package, but study programs are 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. Number of ECTS credits is allocated to reach subject according to the ECTS Guidelines. The structure of the study programs is flexible and allows each student to choose his/her own learning path, corresponding to their own interests and skills.

The percentage of teaching hours corresponding to optional disciplines out of the total number of hours cumulated at the end of the Licence (*1st Cycle*) study program complies with the provisions of the specific standards.

Ref. 2: The structure of the study programs is flexible and allows each student to choose his/her own learning path, corresponding to their own interests and skills, without prejudice to the objectives of the study program and to the skills expected at the end of the learning process.

Ref. 3: Study programs provide communication skills in two foreign languages, of which at least one is a world language.

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

Min: The study programs have a unitary structure, regardless of the form of study (full-time, part-time, distance learning) but their implementation is differentiated by the means used in the study form, so as to ensure the continuous progress of students throughout the duration of studies. For full time and distance learning forms, the indicator is differentiated correspondingly.

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

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

Ref. 3: The education provider/education institution has regulated procedures for the integration and adaptation of students to the institution and program.

IP.B.1.2.3. Relevance of study programs

Min: The cognitive and professional relevance of the study programs are defined in relation to the development of knowledge and technology in the field and to the labor market and qualification requirements.

The design of study programs is defined with the involvement of students and other stakeholders. The term of stakeholders refers to all internal actors, including students and staff, as well as to external actors, such as graduates, employers, or external partners of the institution. The study programs are revised periodically, based on peer reviews, together with students, graduates, and employer representatives, thus receiving external expertise and benchmarks. The education provider/education institution has its own mechanism for the annual peer review of the knowledge transferred and assimilated by students and also for analyzing the changes produced in the qualification profiles and their impact on the organization of the study program. As students are admitted based on information published before the beginning of the university year, signing a contract of studies with the education provider, the structure of the study program can change only beginning with the year I of the next academic year.

Ref. 1: Study programs are reviewed and improved based on external and internal periodic evaluation. For the current cohort of students, the content of certain

disciplines, the teaching manner and the manner of conducting traineeships etc. can be improved within the study program.

Ref. 2: The education provider/education institution has a regulation concerning the recognition of higher education qualifications, of periods of study and of prior learning; these procedures comply with best practices and/or international regulations which Romania is part of, such as the Lisbon convention, the EU directives on training for regulated professions etc.

Ref. 3: The education provider/education institution has clear procedures on the recognition and validation of transferable credits obtained in other programs of the same institution or of other institutions, which can be recovered or equated by a student in an academic year, which should not exceed 60 ECTS credits.

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 enter the labor market, to develop their own business, to be admitted to the next study cycle and to continuously learn and develop.

Performance indicators

PI.B.2.1.1. Validation through access to the labor market

Min: The education provider/education institution continuously monitors the career of its graduates through its own system organized to this end, and presents an annual detailed report for all study programs.

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 programs, regardless of the field of study*.

Ref. 1: Ref. 1: At least 50% of the last two series of graduates are admitted to Master's programs, regardless of the field of study.**

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

PI B2.1.3 Level of student satisfaction with regard to their professional and personal development provided by the higher education institution

Min: The HEI has and applies regulations concerning the periodic enquiry of students on their satisfaction regarding the educational process, student services and the

infrastructure provided by the university. More than 50% of students have a good opinion on the learning/ development environment provided by the university and its compatibility with their learning paths.

Ref. 1: More than 75% of students have a good opinion on the learning/ development environment provided by the university and its compatibility with their learning paths.

PI B2.1.4 Student-centered learning methods

Min: The main responsibility of the teaching staff is to use student-centered learning methods and environments, and to de-emphasize their traditional role of mere information transmitter. The student-teacher relationship is a partnership in which each party undertakes the responsibility for reaching the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are explained and discussed with students in terms of their relevance to the students' development. The teaching staff use the new technology resources, for example e-mail, a personal webpage for the topic, e-learning platforms, bibliography, electronic resources and student dialog, as well as adequate ancillary materials, from board to flipchart and video projector; they use in a flexible manner a variety of pedagogic methods that encourage debate, exchanges of opinion and teamwork. Student assessment include objective examination and grading, based on criteria and methods that are clearly set forth at the beginning of the semester and on grading scales that are made available to students, together with other criteria for assessing students' activity. Evaluators receive support for developing their evaluation skills. The education institution has procedures for recognition and completion that are adapted to student mobility.

Ref. 1: Teachers are specially trained for teaching at university level and/or take part in debate groups to discuss the teaching methodology. They do not only have training/teaching skills, but also counselling, monitoring, and learning facilitation skills. A continuous process of identifying, developing, testing, implementing, and evaluating new effective learning techniques, including new IT and computer applications, takes place in university. The study programs include traineeships, placements and internships and student involvement in research projects. The 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 and manner. The teaching strategy considers the needs of disabled students as well, particularly of students with special needs, and it also considers and uses various methods for organizing the learning and teaching process, where applicable. Alternative evaluation and examination methods are used for students with permanent or temporary disabilities.

Ref. 2: More than providing the mere 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 students' intellectual development, while giving it a strategic dimension. The education provider/education institution has procedures for recognition and completion that are adapted to student mobility.

PI B2.1.5 Student career guidance

Min: The teaching staff have dedicated hours when they are available to students and customize guidance upon the request of students; the schedule is published on the webpage of the institution. There are counselors or tutors by year of study and/or other forms of interaction between teaching staff and groups of students. The university has at least one career guidance center, with a sufficient number of skilled staff members; the number of the center staff is established depending on the number of students. The center has adequate resources for conducting its activities and publishes a yearly activity report. The career guidance and counseling center keeps contact with employers and university graduates, so as to make the transition between the instruction period and employment.

Ref. 1: Each faculty has a structure for guiding students in choosing their courses and career. Peer tutorage between senior students and other students is in place. Teachers are in contact with students via email and through at least two counseling hours per week.

Criterion B.3 - Scientific Research Activities

S.B.3.1 Research programs

The institution has a long term strategy and medium and short term programs which address the research objective, projects and expected outcomes, as well as the resources for achieving them. There is a research ethos and culture, and mechanisms for validating research outcomes. The strategy includes all scientific fields in which the education provider/the education institution provides higher education, and one of its main goals is the transfer of the results to the teaching/training activities with students, at all university study cycles.

Performance indicators

PI.B3.1.1. Planning of research

Min: The long term strategy and medium and short term research programs are adopted by the Senate and the Councils of faculties; they include the practices for obtaining and allocating resources and the means for validating the research outcomes. Research interests are mainly institutional. The education institution has sufficient financial, logistic and human resources are available for achieving the proposed objectives. The HEI supports student participation in research projects, including by allocating financial resources to this end.

Ref. 1: Research planning takes into consideration, and is made within, the national framework, in terms of competitiveness and validation. Research is relevant particularly at national level.

Ref. 2: Research planning and achievement are made in relation to the European and global framework.

PI B3.1.2. Undertaking research activities

Min: The education provider/education institution has a Code of professional

ethics/academic integrity, which states that academic research complies with professional ethics norms, so as to assure permanent watchfulness against any frauds or breaches of professional ethics in its research activities, including active measure for preventing and eliminating any forms of plagiarism. There are documents that demonstrate the continuous observance of quality or excellence criteria in scientific research, in terms of organization, monitoring of research projects, internal endorsement of results and eliminating practices that do not comply with ethical norms, such as reproducing the results of other research without permission, plagiarism, failure to comply with bioethical norms etc.

Ref. 1: There is an academic climate and a culture that are strongly focused on research, attested by the number of research grants and publications and by the technological and cognitive transfer taking place through consultancy, science parks etc. Students are encouraged to take place in research programs and they have access to the research infrastructure of the university. There are doctoral schools for training young researchers.

PI B3.1.3 Validation of research

Min: Research is validated through: educational publications, scientific publications, technological transfer through consultancy centers, science parks and other structures for validation and the development of new products etc. Each member of the teaching staff and each researcher have at least one publication or teaching or scientific activity per year. The institution takes part in the dissemination of its research results through mass-media.*

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., where 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.*

*** In higher education in the field of arts, the creative activity in the specific fields will be taken into consideration.*

Criterion B.4 - Financial Activity 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 research activities. It has a tax code and a bank account, other than those of the foundation or association within which it operates.

PI B4.1.1. The income and expense budget

Min: The institution has an annual income and expense budget approved by the Senate, which is rigorously complied with. Annual expenses for salaries in a higher education institution must not exceed the percentage of the total income which ensures its sustainable functioning. In order to obtain accreditation, the higher education institution must prove that, during its temporary functioning, at least 30% of the income obtained from student tuition fees has been used for investing 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 support 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.

Ref. 1: The HEI proposes and applies coherent development strategies, which are substantiated over a medium and long term. The education provider allocates a significant percentage of its funds for developing its academic infrastructure. Moreover, student services are financed accordingly, and the resources allocated to this end are continuously developed. Students with outstanding performance, as well as those from vulnerable socio-economic environments, are supported in their proposed activities.

PI B4.1.2 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 annual report, which show that expenses are made according to current legislation provisions, with the income and with their initial destination, as well as the not-for-profit nature 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 activity. The balance sheet, the budgeting account and the outcomes of the external auditing of the financial standings are made public following a review conducted 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 of its student services, and for developing its own quality culture. The 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 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 used in order to achieve the objectives undertaken, in due time, at institutional level and by study programs. The term of quality culture refers to values, norms and activities practiced in the institution in order to initiate, approve, evaluate and monitor the quality of the teaching and research activities.

The activity of internal quality assurance, conducted by internal stakeholders, namely academic staff, students, auxiliary teaching staff, administrative staff, quality assurance staff, also involves external stakeholders, such as employers, graduates and other foreign partners of an institution.

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 concretely developing and monitoring quality, for establishing a quality culture and for continuously increasing quality standards. Quality assurance policies reflect the relation between research, learning and teaching and consider the national context in which the institution conducts its activity as well as the institutional context and its strategic approach.

Performance indicators

PI C. 1.1.1. Organization of the quality assurance system

Min: The institution has a central commission and commissions on study programs which work together in an integrated manner.

Ref. 1: The university promotes actively, at all levels, a culture of quality in education, conducting activities for promoting the mutual respect in the student-teacher relations; the institution has adequate procedures for addressing student complaints. Students are involved in all quality assurance processes and structures, at all institutional levels.

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

PI C. 1.1.2 Quality assurance policies and strategies

Min: There is a policy program, focused on quality, which outlines the means of implementation. Policies and strategies in place in each compartment and stimulate the participation of every member of the teaching and research staff, and also the participation of students. The education institution submits a report on the manner of achievement of the provisions of the quality policies program.

Ref. 1: There are implementation strategies, with concrete provisions and deadlines, which correspond to each policy. The education provider/education institution drafts an annual review of the positive and negative aspects of the internal quality assurance - a SWOT analysis which is made public.

Criterion C.2 - Procedures for the initiation, monitoring and periodic revision of the programs and activities conducted

S.C.2.1 Approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of the study programs and of the diplomas corresponding to qualifications

The university has regulations regarding the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of each study program and diplomas issued, 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 programs

Min: The regulations exist and are implemented, providing the involvement of students and employers in the processes of design and review of the study programs.

Ref. 1: The regulations are associated with a system of monitoring study programs, based on data and information, with a view to improving their functioning.

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

PI C.2.1.2 Correspondence between diplomas and qualifications

Min: Study programs and diplomas are designed and issued depending on the requirements of the academic qualification, established based on the expected learning outcomes; diplomas are issued in compliance with the latter.

Ref. 1: Study programs are periodically reviewed, by consulting students, graduates and employers, so as to reflect the dynamics of the academic and professional qualifications market.

Ref. 2: Study programs 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, so as to monitor the manner and level of achievement of the expected learning outcomes.

Performance indicators

PI C.3.1.1 The HEI has regulations for student examination and grading which are rigorously and consistently applied.

Min: The regulations are in place, as well as specific procedures of acknowledgement and are consistently applied by teaching staff and students. Examinations attended, in addition to the teaching staff member who delivers it, by at least one other specialized

member of the teaching staff. Each assessment process is objective and relies on criteria and methods that are clearly established at the beginning of the semester and on grading scales that are made known to students. The evaluation methods used are varied and encourage critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, case studies etc.

The rules for evaluation consider possible mitigating circumstances as well. There is an official procedure for submitting appeals against the results of the evaluation and for addressing these appeals, which is made known to students.

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

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

IP.C.3.1.2. Integration of evaluation in the teaching and learning plan (curriculum), by courses and study programs

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. Students receive information after the assessment; if necessary, the feedback is connected to counseling the further learning process.

Ref. 1: Diagnostic, formative and summative evaluation assures learning continuity and consistency, are conducted continuously, throughout the entire academic year, so that there is a balance between the final examination and the intermediary ones.

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

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

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

The teaching staff of the HEIs must be adequate, in terms of number and skills, to the total number of students, depending on the field of study, and their qualifications must correspond to specific study programs and to the quality objectives undertaken.

Performance indicators

PI C. 4.1.1. Teaching staff competence and ratio of teaching staff to students

Min: The education provider/higher education institution has to ensure the skills of its teaching staff and applies correct and transparent processes for staff recruitment, integration and development, in compliance with the national regulations in force. The institution explicitly supports and promotes the professional, pedagogic and scientific

development of its own teaching staff. Teaching staff attend periodic sessions of training with a view to improving their teaching and evaluation skills. Depending on the specificity of each study program, the HEI 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 university and the total number of enrolled students enrolled, in compliance with the provisions of the specific standards provided by ARACIS by comparison against international best practices and with the requirements concerning the training for regulated professions in the European Union. When evaluating quality, a member of the teaching staff is considered as tenured in only one university.

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

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

PI C.4.1.2 Peer evaluation

Min: Peer review is organized periodically, based on general criteria and on clear and public procedures.

Ref. 1: Peer reviews are compulsory and takes place regularly. Each department has 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: Student evaluation of the teaching staff is compulsory. There a student evaluation form for all teaching staff members, approved by the Senate, which is applied after each semester; the form is filled out in the absence of any external factor, and the confidentiality of the evaluators is guaranteed. The evaluation results are confidential, being available only to the Dean, the Rector and the teaching staff member who undergoes the evaluation.

Ref. 1: The results of the student evaluation of the teaching staff are discussed individually, processed statistically, by departments, faculties and higher education institution, and analyzed at faculty and institution level, in order to ensure transparency and to design 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 and is also evaluated by the Head of the Department, on an annual basis.

Ref. 1: The HEI 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.

IP.C.4.1.5. Conditions for an adequate performance of the teaching staff activity

Min: The education provider/higher education institution has to provide a framework that supports the teaching staff in conducting their activity in an efficient manner. Such a framework acknowledges the importance of teaching, provides opportunities and promotes the professional development of the teaching staff and of the auxiliary teaching staff, encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies. The pedagogic training of the academic teaching staff is provided in centers/departments of innovation and continuous training in the field of academic level teaching and learning.

Ref. 1: The education provider/education institution encourages and supports scientific activity, so as to strengthen the connection between education and research.

Ref. 2: The HEI supports the participation of the teaching staff and auxiliary teaching staff in programs of national and international mobility. The development of academic infrastructure and the procurement of academic resources required for the learning and research process is done in agreement with the institution development strategy as well.

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 the high quality of student life. Students are informed about the existence of the respective resources.

Performance indicators

PI C.5.1.1 Availability of learning resources

Min: The HEI provides learning resources (textbooks, treatises, bibliographic references, readers, anthologies etc.) for each study program in the libraries, resource centers 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 subject which defines a study program. Each library had an adequate access schedule, adapted to students' needs, and resources for book and publication procurement.

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 programs.

Ref. 2: The education provider/education institution provides conditions for students

with special needs or disabilities, as well as resources and teaching and learning programs for adult students, for students who are employed and for international students.

PI.C.5.1.2 Teaching as a learning resource

Min: The internal quality assurance structures follow the teaching process, so that each teaching staff member uses updated student-centered teaching strategies for each course, corresponding to the study program, students' characteristics, form of study, and predefined quality criteria.

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

PI.C.5.1.3 Incentive and remediation programs

Min: The HEI has incentive programs for stimulating students with high learning performances, as well as remedial programs for students with learning difficulties.

Ref. 1: The university has supplementary tutorage programs, offered by the teaching staff, which students can join.

Ref. 2: The education provider/education institution has structures and procedures for facilitating student mobility within the same system or between different higher education systems, such as an office of international programs, committees for the recognition of qualifications/skills acquired formally or non-formally etc.

C.5.1.4 Student services

Min: The HEI 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 managed. Students are informed on the existence of such services. The HEI demonstrates that it has a multi-annual strategic plan, made operational, with a view to the diversifying and improving the services offered; they are periodically monitored and assessed, including by enquiring students on their opinion of the functioning of these services. The HEI makes available to students the framework, infrastructure and resources needed for the development of extracurricular activities, organized by the institution or by student organizations.

Ref. 1: The HEI offers various student services and special programs aimed to ensure a high quality of the student life, which it monitors and evaluates regularly. The HEI analyses models of national and international best practices for improving student services, providing solutions to this end.

Ref. 2: The HEI analyses models of national and international best practices for improving student services, providing a wide range of such services. Each category of students identified receives student services that are especially designed for them, for example crèches/kindergartens for the students of students who are mothers etc.

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

S.C.6.1 Information systems

The HEI collect, process, and analyze data and information regarding the quality of education and of student life in the university. The institutions need to assure that the relevant information is collected, analyzed and used for the efficient management of the study programs and of other activities.

PI. C. 6.1.1 Databases and information

Min: The institution has an information system which facilitates the collection, processing, and analysis of data and information that are relevant for the institutional quality evaluation and assurance. The policy, strategic and administrative decisions are substantiated based on the information collected and analyzed.

Ref. 1: In addition to information regarding institutional quality, the HEI 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 - Transparency of information of public interest with regard to study programs, certificates, diplomas and qualifications provided

S. C.7.1 — Public information

The public transparency of data and information, in printed and electronic format, on all qualifications and study programs, as well as the timeliness, accuracy and validity of this information, must be constantly demonstrated. The HEI has a webpage where is makes available fundamental documents, such as the University Charter, the Code of Ethics, the regulations in force etc..

Performance indicators

C. 7.1.1 The provision of public information

Min: The HEI and all its faculties must provide quantitative and/or qualitative, current and correct information and data on qualifications, study programs, 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. Student Guidelines are in place, updated annually, with all the relevant information on students' academic path, the extracurricular activities and the support services available, as well as the rights and opportunities the HEI provides. Graduates receive the Diploma supplement, free of charge, which contains all the information provided by the regulations in force.

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

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

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

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

Performance indicators

PI.C.8.1.1 The (quality) commission coordinates the implementation of the procedures and activities for quality evaluation and assurance

Min: The evaluation procedures and activities regarding the quality of education have been designed and approved by the Senate of the higher education institution. The Commission drafts 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 works together with other HEIs in Romania or abroad in order to identify and adopt best practices in the areas of quality.

Criterion C.9 - Periodic (cyclic) external quality assurance

S.C. 9.1 Institutions undergo periodic external quality assurance, in compliance with ESG

Performance indicators

IP.C.9.1.1. Accredited HEIs and/or their structures take part in the external quality assurance in a cyclic manner, according to the legal provisions in force. External quality assurance can take different forms and can focus on various levels of organizations, namely study program, master’s field, doctoral school, doctoral field or institution.

Min: The education provider/education institution observes the legal provisions concerning the cyclic external evaluation.

Ref. 1: The education provider/education institution is externally evaluated by another institution which is not specified as mandatory by the law, institutionally or by various fields or professional structures.

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

FIELDS	Criteria	Standards	Performance indicators
A. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY	Criterion A.1 - Institutional, Administrative and Managerial Structures	<i>S.A.1.1. Mission, objectives and academic integrity</i>	<i>PI.A.1.1.1. Mission and objectives PI.A.1.1.2. Academic integrity PI.A.1.1.3. Responsibility and public accountability</i>
		<i>S.A.1.2 Management and administration</i>	<i>PI.A.1.2.1. Management System PI.A.1.2.2. Strategic Management PI.A.1.2.3. Effective Administration</i>
	Criterion A.2 - Material	<i>S.A.2.1. Property, equipment, financial</i>	<i>PI.A.2.1.1. Facilities for teaching, research and other activities</i>

FIELDS	Criteria	Standards	Performance indicators
	Resources	<i>resources allocated, student support</i>	<p>PI.A.2.1.2. Equipment</p> <p>PI.A.2.1.3. Adequate financial resources for teaching and learning activities, adequate support services that are easily accessible to students</p> <p>PI.A.2.1.4. System of scholarship allocation and other forms of material support for students</p> <p>PI.A.2.1.5. Administrative staff for student support services</p>
B. EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS	Criterion B.1 - Content of Study Programs	<i>S.B.1.1. Student admission</i>	<p>PI.B.1.1.1. Principles of admission policy to study programs provided by the institution</p> <p>PI.B.1.1.2. Admission practices</p>
		<i>S.B.1.2. Structure and range of study programs</i>	<p>PI.B.1.2.1. Structure of study programs</p> <p>PI.B.1.2.2. Differentiation in the implementation of study programs</p> <p>PI.B.1.2.3. Relevance of study programs</p>
	Criterion B.2 - Learning outcomes	<i>S.B.2.1 Validation of academic qualifications</i>	<p>PI.B.2.1.1. Validation through access to the labor market</p> <p>PI.B.2.1.2. Validation through access to the next level of academic studies</p> <p>PI.B.2.1.3. Level of student satisfaction with regard to their professional and personal development provided by the higher education institution</p> <p>PI.B.2.1.4. Student-centered learning methods</p> <p>PI.B.2.1.5. Student career guidance</p>
	Criterion B.3 - Scientific Research Activities	<i>S.B.3.1. Research programs</i>	<p>PI.B.3.1.1. Planning of Research</p> <p>PI.B.3.1.2. Undertaking Research</p> <p>PI.B.3.1.3. Validation of research</p>
	Criterion B.4 - Financial Activity of the Organization	<i>S.B.4.1 Budgeting and accounting</i>	<p>PI.B.4.1.1. The income and expense budget</p> <p>PI.B.4.1.2. Accounting</p> <p>PI.B.4.1.3. Auditing and public accountability</p>
C. QUALITY MANAGEMENT	Criterion C.1 - Quality Assurance Strategies and Procedures	<i>S.C.1.1. Quality Assurance Structures and Policies</i>	<p>PI.C.1.1.1. Organization of the quality assurance system</p> <p>PI.C. 1.1.2. Quality assurance policies and strategies</p>
	Criterion C.2 - Procedures for the initiation, monitoring and periodic revision of the programs and activities conducted	<i>S.C.2.1. Approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of the study programs and of the diplomas corresponding to qualifications</i>	<p>PI.C.2.1.1. Existence and implementation of regulations regarding the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programs</p> <p>PI.C.2.1.2. Correspondence between diplomas and qualifications</p>
	Criterion C.3 - Objective and Transparent Procedures for Evaluating Learning	<i>S.C.3.1. Student evaluation</i>	<p>PI.C.3.1.1. The HEI has regulations for student examination and grading which are rigorously and consistently applied.</p> <p>PI.C.3.1.2. Integration of evaluation in the teaching and learning plan</p>

FIELDS	Criteria	Standards	Performance indicators
	Outcomes		<i>(curriculum), by courses and study programs</i>
	Criterion C.4 - Procedures for the periodic evaluation of the teaching staff quality	S.C.4.1. The quality of the teaching and research staff	<i>PI.C.4.1.1. Teaching staff competence and ratio of teaching staff to students PI.C.4.1.2. Peer evaluation PI.C.4.1.3. Student evaluation of the teaching staff PI.C.4.1.4 University management's evaluation of the teaching staff PI.C.4.1.5 Conditions for an adequate performance of the teaching staff activity</i>
	Criterion C.5 - Access to adequate learning resources	S.C.5.1. Learning resources and student services	<i>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 programs PI.C.5.1.4. Student services</i>
	Criterion C.6 - Regularly updated database on internal quality assurance	S.C.6.1. Information systems	<i>PI.C.6.1.1 Databases and information</i>
	Criterion C.7 - Transparency of information of public interest with regard to study programs, certificates, diplomas, and qualifications provided	S.C.7.1. Public information	<i>PI.C.7.1.1 The provision of public information</i>
	Criterion C.8 - Operational quality assurance structures, according to the Law	S.C.8.1. The institutional structure for quality assurance in education corresponds to the legal provisions and acts on a permanent basis	<i>PI.C.8.1.1. The (quality) commission coordinates the implementation of the procedures and activities for quality evaluation and assurance</i>
	Criterion C.9 - Periodic (cyclic) external quality assurance	S.C.9.1. Institutions undergo periodic external quality assurance, in compliance with ESG	<i>PI.C.9.1.1. Accredited HEIs and/or their structures take part in the external quality assurance in a cyclic manner, according to the legal provisions in force. External quality assurance can take different forms and can focus on various levels of organizations, namely study program, master's field, doctoral school, doctoral field or institution</i>

PART III: EXTERNAL QUALITY EVALUATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The quality of study and research programs is pursued and further developed by each higher education institution. The areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators provide only 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.

Quality assurance policies reflect the relation between learning, teaching and research and consider the national context in which the institution performs its activity as well as the institutional context and its strategic approach.

The **Methodology** is defined and conceived adequately to its goals and objectives, and considers, at the same time, the existing relevant regulations. The **Methodology** and the *Guide* consider the workload required for institutions, aim at supporting the institutions in terms of quality improvement, and allow and require the HEI to demonstrate these improvements and lead to clear information concerning the results of external quality assurance, as well as following the implementation of the recommendations.

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

- a) for the provisional authorization to operate for a study program (program authorization), or a higher education services provider (institutional authorization);
- b) for the accreditation of a study program (program 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 largely the same for the provisional authorization to operate, accreditation and periodic evaluation for quality assurance. The only difference consists in their proportion and refers to the difference between the authorization or accreditation of a program, and the institutional authorization or accreditation. A study program only represents a part of an institution or university - hence difference of proportion.

3.1 Stages of academic quality evaluation

There are three successive stages of academic quality evaluation:

- a) the drafting, by the provider or institution, of a **quality self-evaluation report**;
- b) the **external evaluation** of quality;
- c) the implementation of recommendations resulting from the self-evaluation and external evaluation, and the monitoring, by the agency, together with the education institution

and/or other entities, of their implementation.

The **self-evaluation report** is an official document drafted by the education provider, institution or university which applies for the provisional authorization to operate (for a program or an institution), the accreditation of a program of an institution, or the periodic external evaluation of quality assurance. The self-evaluation report is drafted by consulting students and other stakeholders, such as graduates and employers. The self-evaluation report has two parts:

- a) The **analytical part** is narrative and has 20-50 pages; the size varies by the size of the object being evaluated (study program or institution), and represents the findings of the management of the institution/study program and of the academic community, including students, with regard to the 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 submitted in electronic and written form.
- b) The **justification part** includes documents, charts, tables, illustrations, etc., intended to support the analysis presented in the first part. These are complementary and based on data and information which can be found in the institutions' databases. The self-evaluation report for the provisional authorization to operate or for accreditation shall include a part that outlines the achievement of each normative requirement mentioned in Part IV of the **Methodology**.

The self-evaluation report uses as compulsory references the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in this **Methodology**, so that its main chapters reflect 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 supporting 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 supporting documents in the form of Standard of Reference specific to the program or institution. Within an institution or university with study programs already accredited, the general presentation does not include descriptions and references for every single program. One or another program could be mentioned only for illustrative purposes. However, for the external evaluation of quality, complete data and information on each study program organized by the higher education institution will be made available. For the external evaluation of quality of the institution or of the study programs, the institution needs to make available complete data and information concerning the assurance of the institutional capacity and of the existence of sufficient teaching staff, including in other fields where the same staff teach. Self-evaluation reports for external periodic evaluation should contain a third part as well, namely the Analysis on the positive and negative aspects of the internal quality assurance - SWOT analysis, for the period between two successive external evaluations, considering the results of the implementation of recommendations resulting from the self-evaluation and the external evaluation.

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) visiting the program by a team made-up of three-four evaluators, which also includes one or more students, for a duration of three-four days, so as to concretely assess the correspondence between the data, information and conclusions of the self-assessment, on the one hand, and the actual institutional reality, on the other hand; the findings of the visit are noted in an external evaluation report which is concretized in conclusions and recommendations; for institutional evaluations, with a view to assuring transparency to the process, student evaluators and the international evaluator draft a separate report, from the most important elements are taken and included in the joint report of the visiting team;

c) the completion of the recommendations with regard to quality improvement, after being discussed with representatives of the institution and/or study program, approved by the ARACIS Council, and the external evaluation report has been made public.

The main conclusion, in the case of provisional authorization to operate and of the accreditation, consists in granting or not granting the respective status. In the case of an external evaluation of quality assurance at accredited HEI, 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 university'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 no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended, apply.

The implementation of recommendations resulting from the self-evaluation and external evaluation, and the monitoring, by the agency, together with the education institution and/or other entities, of their implementation is a coherent process aimed at assessing the measures taken by the institution and their impact. The nature and manner of monitoring the follow-up of the recommendations are described in detail in the *Guide*. ARACIS conducts activities of monitoring the implementation stage of the recommendations by the education provider, mid-interval between two successive external evaluations, according to the law or whenever deemed necessary.

3.2 External evaluation standards

An external evaluation of quality assurance or for authorization 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 for higher education. 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 achievement 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 conducting an external evaluation process, the ARACIS Council and the management of the institution must analyze the implications and the applications of the procedure.

c) Decision-making criteria

Any recommendation and any formal decision resulting 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 between 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 designed and applied so that the following conditions are observed: the external evaluators must have the capacities, skills and experience necessary for external evaluation; the ARACIS Council must select and include in the Register of experts those academics from Romania and abroad who are known for their professional competence, moral integrity and expertise in the field of quality assurance; the ARACIS Council should offer to the experts the possibility of training in the field of external quality evaluation; students should be involved in the external evaluation; whenever possible, international experts should be involved; evaluative statements must always be based on supporting documents and on 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 drafted in a clear style, accessible to all those interested. The recommendations and conclusions are adequately emphasized in the text. The evaluation report is published on the agency webpage and disseminated. Readers must be able to express their opinion.

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 drafted, including special provisions and deadlines. ARACIS monitors the implementation of the recommendations formulated through activities of monitoring - follow up.

g) The frequency 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

The ARACIS Council drafts an annual synthetic report on the quality assurance in the

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 Ministry of National Education and published.

i) Information for institutional benchmarking for quality

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

j) The continuous improvement of the ARACIS Council's performance

The ARACIS Council must permanently improve its own procedures, techniques and standards, with the cooperation of the stakeholders. The ARACIS 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 the external quality evaluation

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

- a) proposes and finalizes, on a contract basis, after receiving the ARACIS 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 authorization and accreditation, at ARACIS Council's request, based on a specific methodology approved by the ARACIS Council.

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

The areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in the Methodology correspond to the Government Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended.

The areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in the **Methodology** are implemented by all higher education institutions for both obtaining a provisional authorization to operate or the accreditation and the evaluation of the quality of the educational activities. The manner of implementation of the elements specified in the **Methodology**, which have a minimal nature, 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 supporting databases or for the internal quality management, each higher education institution must address at least the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators presented in the **Methodology**;
- b) the 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) failure to achieve 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 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended.

d) HEIs 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 in benchmarking and is based on comparisons with successful universities from the European Higher Education Area or worldwide. The ARACIS Council can 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 programs requires differentiated funding according to the quality of the study programs. ARACIS works together with the National Higher Education Funding Council (NHEFC) in order to establish the quality indicators used for financing, compatible with the performance indicators outlined in the **Methodology**.

PART IV: DIFFERENTIATED STAGES OF EVALUATION BY CYCLES OF ACADEMIC STUDIES

The **Methodology** provides the general framework of quality assurance in higher education. The areas, criteria, standards, and performance indicators are formulated so that they are applicable in the areas of quality assurance and accreditation for any type of institution or higher education provider, and for any study program. However, certain differentiations are necessary. This part outlines the details concerning this differentiation.

4.1 The provisional authorization to operate and accreditation/periodic evaluation

The provisional authorization to operate for a higher education institution or a study program, and their accreditation, is part of the quality assurance in higher education. The awarding of the provisional authorization to operate is a process that precedes the beginning of the actual provision of educational services by an education provider that initiates a university study program. The process consists, on the one hand, in verifying the observance of the legal conditions and of other regulations in force by the education provider, and, on the other hand, in analyzing its capacity to provide quality assurance for the educational offer proposed. The provisional authorization to operate, once obtained, gives the right to organize and carry out the educational process and organize, if necessary, entrance examinations.

The accreditation is subsequent to authorization; after the completion of the process, it gives the right to issue diplomas, certificates and other study documents recognized at national and international level and to organize graduation or Licence Degree examinations, as well as to organize Master's Degree and Doctoral studies which have to be accredited. The accreditation also considers the experience and the outcomes obtained during the period of functioning with provisional authorization to operate, as well as the stage of development of procedures of quality assurance and of a quality culture at the level of the education provider.

The periodic evaluation is conducted for the accredited structures and HEIs, taking the reference of the standards and performance indicators used for accreditation.

4.1.1. Procedures for the provisional authorization to operate and accreditation/periodic evaluation

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

The external evaluation for the provisional authorization/accreditation/periodic evaluation must be conducted for each study program of the first university studies cycle which leads to a distinct academic qualification. The programs that are specific to master's study cycles undergo, individually, external evaluations, where applicable.

The procedure used for initiating external evaluation includes the following activities:

- a) an organization interested in providing higher education services elaborates a self-evaluation report for each type of study program taking into consideration the requirements of the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators;

- b) the application for launching the procedure for external evaluation and provisional authorization to operate is submitted at the ARACIS registry; after the endorsement of the request by the agency, the self-evaluation report is submitted at the ARACIS registry, together with the contract signed by the organization; the external evaluation procedure is considered to begin upon the date when the contract is signed by ARACIS as well;
- c) the accreditation department appoints a commission of experts in external evaluation, including at least one member from a national minority when evaluating a program or a provider in the language of a national minority; the commission analyzes the self-evaluation report, verifies, through visits to the applicant institution, the meeting of the Standards and drafts its own evaluation report; the commission also includes an student evaluator from the National Registry of Student Evaluators of ARACIS;
- d) The ARACIS Council validates the experts' report by verifying the observance of the methodology for external evaluation and proposes to the Ministry of National Education the granting or not granting of the provisional authorization to operate, accordingly;
- e) the provisional authorization to operate is granted to organizations interested in carrying out higher education activities by government decision, upon the proposal of the Ministry of National Education based on the ARACIS Council's favorable advise.

The procedure used for initiating the external evaluation for accreditation includes the following activities:

- 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 application for launching the procedure for external evaluation and accreditation is submitted at the ARACIS registry; after the endorsement of the request by the agency, the self-evaluation report is submitted at the ARACIS registry, together with the contract signed by the organization; the external evaluation procedure is considered to begin upon the date when the contract is signed by ARACIS as well;
- c) the term for submitting the approval for accreditation should comply with legal provisions;
- d) the accreditation department of the ARACIS Council appoints a commission of evaluation and accreditation experts from which at least one member comes from a national minority when a program or provider in the language of a national minority is to be evaluated; the commission 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 drafts its own evaluation report;

- e) The ARACIS Council validates the experts' report by verifying the observance of the methodology for external evaluation and proposes to the Ministry of National Education the granting or not granting of the accreditation, accordingly;
- f) The accreditation at institutional level is awarded to education providers/organizations conducting higher education activities by law, upon the proposal of the Ministry of National Education, based on the advise of ARACIS.

The application for provisional authorization to operate for a study program is addressed by ARACIS within six months from signing the contract with the Agency. The authorized study program may run in the academic year following the date of the ARACIS advise and of the Government's Decision.

Between the delivery of the provisional authorization to operate and the formulation of the accreditation application, ARACIS organizes periodic visits for external evaluation of the implementation of the quality assurance criteria and standards.

The procedure for the initiation of the external periodic evaluation of the study programs accredited is similar with the accreditation procedure. The application for accreditation/periodic evaluation is addressed by ARACIS within six months from signing the contract with the Agency, based on the self-evaluation report and on the external evaluation conducted by ARACIS.

4.1.2 Objectives of the activities for provisional authorization to operate and accreditation/periodic evaluation

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

- ✓ the analysis of the quality of the study programs offered by the higher education institutions and, where necessary, support for the elimination of educational quality dysfunctions and deficiencies;
- ✓ support for the continuous improvement of the quality of education by disseminating best practices and encouraging experience exchange between HEIs which offer similar study programs;
- ✓ ensuring the process of providing effective and accessible information to the public with regard to the quality of the study programs, by publishing the institutions' self-evaluation reports.

ARACIS offers public information through its own evaluation reports on two distinct and independent aspects:

- ✓ taking as reference the ***quality standards*** for a subject or a study program, the ARACIS report assesses the extent to which the expected learning outcomes established by the provider of the study program itself can be actually reached in 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 to the progress achieved by students in different programs.

The specific objectives of the provisional authorization and accreditation are the following:

- a) to assure the academic communities, the beneficiaries and the public at large that the education providing organization, authorized or accredited to organize study programs demonstrates that it complies with minimum quality standards for a higher education institution;
- b) to promote the commitment of the institution to the continuous improvement of academic quality, proven by learning and research outcomes;
- c) to support higher education institutions in developing a quality management and culture, as well as demonstrating their achievements through evidence and relevant documents;
- d) to determine 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 to work together with other higher education institutions towards accomplishing, monitoring and comparing academic quality;
- f) to identify and make public any attempt to offer a program which does not meet the minimum standards of academic quality.

4.2 Normative requirements concerning the provisional authorization to operate and accreditation/periodic evaluation for Licence (*1st cycle*) study programs

A provisional authorization precedes the actual performance of educational services by an initiator of a Licence study program. The provisional authorization 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 be concretized in high quality outcomes and, on the other hand, in analyzing its capacity to implement the proposed study program according to the law. The accreditation takes into consideration the operational experience and the degree of development of a quality culture.

To this end, 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 which the authorization/accreditation/periodic evaluation is applied for, and by visiting the provider's premises, ARACIS verifies the compliance with the following **compulsory normative requirements**:

- 1. With respect to the legal framework of the organization and functioning of a higher education institution as an education providing organization, its mission and objectives,*

as follows:

a) in order to obtain its provisional authorization to operate and accreditation, a higher education institution must make proof of its own legal status, established through its articles of incorporation/founding legal document;

b) a higher education institution which applies for provisional authorization to operate or for accreditation must prove that it has a clearly formulated educational and scientific 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 labor market.

2. With respect to the teaching staff:

a) for the purpose of this Methodology, the term of *teaching staff* is understood as the staff that conduct educational and research activities in the respective higher education institution;

b) the teaching staff has to comply with the requirements of the legislation in force.

c) the positions in the teaching staff roster are occupied in compliance with the legislation in force;

d) for each study program, the chair-holders (*heads of disciplines*) meet at least one of the following conditions:

- have "*Licence*" university studies in the field of the disciplines taught;
- are doctorate coordinators/*(advisers)* in the field of the disciplines taught;
- the topic of their doctoral thesis is in the field of the disciplines taught;

e) when granting the provisional authorization or the accreditation, the teaching staff tenured in the higher education institution at which they are based, are taken into consideration for a single teaching load, established according to the Law;

f) in order to assure the quality of education activities, the teaching staff tenured 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;

g) the teaching staff with tenure in higher education, retired due to age limit or for other reasons, may continue their activity or they may work as non-tenured teaching staff, in compliance with legal provisions, but they cannot cover more than one teaching load in the respective education institution.

h) with a view to obtaining the provisional authorization to operate, the institution should have, for each specialization, at least 70% of positions, established in compliance with the law, covered with teaching staff tenured in higher education according to the law, in compliance with legal norms, and at least 25% of them need to be covered by university professors and assistant professors. The number of teaching staff working full time should be higher than 40% of the total number of teaching positions established according to the law.

i) with a view to **accreditation/periodic evaluation**, the higher education institution should have, for each study program, at least 70% of positions established in compliance with the law covered with teaching staff tenured in higher education, or of reserved position in compliance with legal norms, and at least 25% of them need to be covered by university professors and assistant professors.

j) the number of teaching staff whose tenure in higher education has been granted according to the legal provisions, taken into consideration for the provisional authorization to operate or the accreditation of each institutional structure and each study program of the Licence Degree cycle, is the one resulted when considering the fulltime and part-time positions in the teaching staff roster which they cover in the respective structure or program;

k) non-tenured 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 ARACIS evaluation, provided it meets the legal requirements for occupying the respective positions;

l) chair-holders (*heads of disciplines*) must be PhD holders in the field of the occupied teaching positions; the other teaching staff must have initial training and skills in the field of the discipline taught;

m) in order to obtain accreditation, a higher education institution must prove that the chair-holders (*heads of disciplines*) have elaborated courses and other academic works necessary for the teaching process, which fully cover the topics of the respective disciplines in the syllabus;

n) 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;

o) the non-tenured (*associated*) 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, on number of teaching hours worked as an associate, and to obtain the approval of the university senate of the institution where they are based;

p) the teaching staff that occupy positions of teaching assistant must hold a certified pedagogical training;

q) the number of the teaching staff who are highly specialized in a certain field and who have exceeded the statutory retirement age must not exceed 20% of the total number of teaching positions in the roster;

r) the management staff of the higher education institution, namely the rector, the vice-rector, the dean, the vice-dean and the heads of the departments have to be elected or appointed in compliance with the legislation in force;

s) the higher education institution ensures, for at least one Licence cycle, that the activities provided for disciplines in the curriculum are covered with skilled teaching staff;

3. With respect to the educational process:

a) in order to obtain the provisional authorization to operate or the accreditation/periodic evaluation, the curricula must include fundamental disciplines, specialized disciplines in the field and complementary disciplines, organized respectively as compulsory – *mandatory* and *optional* disciplines and *non-compulsory free-choice* disciplines, according to the normative requirements established at national level and to the ARACIS specific standards;

b) the study disciplines included in the curricula are organized in a logical succession and aim to fulfill the following requirements:

- 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/correspondence, according to the case, with similar curricula and study programs 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 syllabi which specify the objectives of the disciplines, the basic thematic content, the distribution of the number of hours for lectures, seminar, and applied activities etc., by topic, student evaluation system, and a minimum bibliography;

d) the list of disciplines included in the curriculum and their content, which are specified in the syllabi, correspond to the licence field and the study program for which the respective curricula have been elaborated, and correspond to the declared mission;

e) the academic year is structured in two semesters averaging 14-weeks, with 22-28 hours/week, for the first study cycle (Licence Degree cycle) depending on the field of study, with the exception of study programs regulated by European Union directives;

f) each semester has 30 credits that are transferable in the European system (ECTS) for the compulsory disciplines, irrespective of the form of education - full-time, part-time, distance learning;

g) “part-time”, “distance” or other forms of study - which do not require compulsory campus attendance cannot be offered unless accredited “full time” study form already exists;

h) the *non-compulsory free-choice* disciplines, regardless of the semester in which they are scheduled in the curriculum, 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 lecture hours and the hours for applicative teaching activities - seminars, laboratory work, projects, traineeships (*practice*) etc. have to comply with the ARACIS specific standards;

j) the curricula of the Licence (*1st Cycle*) study program must include a 2-3-week traineeship (*practice*) per year, beginning with the second year of study, as well as during the final year of study;

k) for traineeship (*practice*) periods, the higher education institution has established collaboration agreements, contracts or other collaboration documents with traineeship partner

companies, which specify: the place and period of training; the organization mode and guiding principles; the representatives of the higher education institution and of the traineeship partner companies etc.;

l) at least 50% of the testing activities of the study disciplines included in the curriculum are examinations;

4. *With respect to students:*

a) student recruitment observes the institutions' own admission procedures;

b) registration to competitive entrance examination can be made only 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 performance of the education process;

d) the faculty timetable shows that the study program submitted for evaluation can be carried out in normal conditions, as required by Law;

e) the proportion of students passing 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 learning outcomes for a study period must be certified by a transcript of records;

g) the institution has regulated procedures for student progress from a year of study to the next one, based on accumulated ECTS study credits, as well as procedures for undertaking two study years in one, in compliance with the legislation in force;

h) student transfer between higher education institutions, faculties and specializations (*study programs*) is internally regulated and it is not made during the academic year, in compliance with the legislation in force;

i) in order for the institution to be accredited, the cohorts of graduates of the higher education institution provisionally authorized to operate must sit for the final examination at an accredited institution which has the same licence domain or study program, established by ARACIS. The Board of Examiners cannot include members of the teaching staff from the faculties or the study programs where the candidates to the final examination pursued their studies.

j) in order to obtain the accreditation for a study program, the institution must prove that:

- at least 51% of the total number of each cohort of graduates passed the final examination;

- at least 40 % of the first cohorts 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 authorized to operate, who sat for their final examination at another accredited higher education institution established by ARACIS and passed the final examination, are issued by the institutions that organized 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

National Education;

l) the certificate and diploma awarding observes the current legal provisions;

5. *With respect to scientific research*

a) the licence domain, respectively the study program submitted for evaluation, has its own scientific research plan, which is part of the faculty's strategic plan, and implicitly of the institution's plan, certified by documents kept within the departments, faculty etc.;

b) the research themes included in the plan correspond to the scientific area of the licence domain and the study program etc., submitted for evaluation;

c) the teaching staff carry out scientific research activities within the field of 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; contributions presented in scientific sessions, symposia, seminars etc. in Romania and/or abroad; collaboration contracts, expertise, and/or consultancy given on a contractual basis or according to agreements with partners from Romania or abroad, evaluated and certified by specialized commissions etc.;

e) scientific research outcomes obtained in the laboratories of the education structure submitted for evaluation are validated through publications, patents etc.;

f) students are supported and motivated to conduct research activities; they are involved in research projects and financially supported to take part in national and international scientific conferences/symposia;

g) the faculty organizes periodically, with its teaching staff, researchers, and graduates, scientific sessions, symposia, conferences, roundtables, and their contributions and outcomes are published in scientific bulletins which bare an ISBN or ISSN, or in journals dedicated to the organized activity.

6. *With respect to material resources:*

a) the material resources owned by the higher education institution which is subject to evaluation must correspond to the standards for a high quality education process;

b) with a view to obtaining the provisional authorization to operate, the higher education institution must prove with appropriate documents (property documents, rental contracts, inventory records, invoices etc.) that for the study program submitted to evaluation it has, for at least 2 years in advance of the study year:

- owned or rented facilities that are adequate to the education process;

- owned or rented laboratories with adequate equipment for all compulsory disciplines included in the curriculum, the syllabus of which includes this type of activities;

- adequate software and the related user's license for the disciplines included in the curriculum;

c) a library with a reading room and its own fund of publications, adequate to the disciplines included in the curricula;

d) the capacity of the spaces allocated for the study program which is subject to evaluation must be of:

- minimum 1sqm /place, in lecture (*course*) rooms;
- minimum 1.4 sqm/place, in seminar rooms;
- minimum 1.5 sqm/place, in library 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.;

e) the number of places in course 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 National Education;

f) to ensure that 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 two students in the Licence Degree study cycle and one computer per student is available in the Master's study cycle;

g) the libraries of the 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 with 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 own fund of publications must include a sufficient number of copies in order to cover the needs of all students enrolled in the study cycle and the academic year for which the respective discipline is provided;

- the fund of publications must include a sufficient number of subscriptions to Romanian and foreign publications and periodicals, corresponding to the stated (*declared*) mission;

7. *With respect to the financial activity:*

a) in order to obtain the provisional authorization to operate or the accreditation for a study program or for a higher education structure, an applicant institution must prove that it has its own income and expenses budget for higher education activities, a tax (*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, each year, 65% of the total income.

c) in order to obtain the accreditation, the higher education institution must prove that, during its (*authorized*) provisional functioning, at least 30% of the income obtained from

student tuition fees has been used every year or investing in its own material resources.

d) in order to obtain accreditation, the higher education institution must prove that during its provisional authorization period it proceeded to the organization of its accounting activity by establishing an inventory record, a balance sheet, a budgeting account and an annual report, which demonstrate that all expenses were made in accordance with the legislation in force, the income and their stated destination, as well as the not-for-profit profile of the institution;

e) 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 or Master's studies, and are communicated to students through various means;

f) students are informed with regard to the possibilities of financial support offered by the institution and the way in which 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 its education premises and equipment with all their related facilities;

h) in order to obtain the accreditation, as well as during their further operating, the 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. *With respect to the management activity and institutional structures:*

a) with a view to obtaining accreditation, the higher education institution must prove that it has complied with all legal regulations for the election/appointment of its collective management bodies - management board, faculty council and senate, of the management of departments, respectively heads of departments, of faculties, respectively dean, vice dean and of the institution - rector and vice rector as well as regarding student representation in the collective management bodies, according to the law;

b) in order to obtain the provisional authorization to operate or the accreditation, the higher education institution must prove that it has a University Charter, 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 authorization to operate and the accreditation, a higher education institution must prove the existence of an organization chart filled in with its own staff, corresponding professionally to the occupancy requirements of the respective positions;

e) in order to obtain the provisional authorization 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 in the field, on forms homologated to this end - mark sheets, registration books, transcripts of records, diplomas, etc.;

f) during the period of provisional authorization to operate, a higher education institution must observe the standards based on which the authorization has been granted. The higher education institutional structures and the operating conditions for the study programs, respectively specializations for which the provisional authorization to operate has been granted, can be modified only based on the re-initiation of the evaluation procedures. The ARACIS Council and other public authorities authorized by Law undertake verification activities on an annual basis or whenever it is considered necessary, free of charge. When the non-fulfillment of the quality standards is found, the provisions of Art. 34 of GEO 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended, should apply.

The normative requirements are detailed in specific standards by Licence degree fields and by study programs, by each Permanent specialty commission, depending on the specificity of the specialization (*study program*) and on the form of education, on the language of teaching and are subject to the ARACIS Council approval. The specific standards are drafted with the participation of all stakeholders, namely employers, graduates, students and other persons representing professional categories, as applicable.

The observance of these compulsory normative requirements must be certified by justifying documents. The certified information meets every requirement and is presented in the first chapter of the evaluation report. The corresponding 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.

The provisional authorization to operate and the accreditation of study programs is conducted distinctly for each form of education, each teaching language and each geographic location where it takes place.

In order to obtain the provisional authorization to operate/accreditation, as well as for the periodic evaluation of a Licence degree study program, the education provider/higher education institution/university needs to prove that it continues to meet all quality standards and normative requirements that are compulsory for all study programs - Licence, Master's, Doctorate provided by the institution in the same field of university studies, as well all in the related fields where the same staff teach; it also needs to prove that the material resources allow the adequate performance of the educational process.

4.3 Methodological stages concerning the provisional authorization to operate and accreditation/periodic evaluation for Licence (*1st cycle*) study programs

Pursuant to Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended, the ARACIS Council drafts the external evaluation methodology, respectively the authorization methodology for the provisional authorization to operate and for accreditation.

1. The *methodology for granting a provisional authorization to operate (function)* to a study program or to any higher education structure requires the following successive working stages:

a) based on the request for initiating the procedure for provisional authorization to operate, submitted to ARACIS by the education provider, the ARACIS Council decide on the initiation of the external evaluation procedure, provided the following conditions are simultaneously fulfilled:

- the education provider has submitted the request for launching the procedure for the education structure for which the provisional authorization to operate is requested;

- the education provider proves with documents that the fee required by law for granting a provisional authorization to operate has been paid;

- the institution has submitted the internal evaluation report, drafted in compliance with the provisions of art. 10 of the Government Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended;

- the external evaluation contract has been signed by both parties.

b) the accreditation department of ARACIS appoints a commission consisting of three-four experts in evaluation and accreditation, selected from the ARACIS Registry of Evaluators, who are specialized in the field of the higher education structure submitted for evaluation. The commission also includes a student who is on the ARACIS National Registry of Student Evaluators. This Commission analyzes the internal evaluation report and verifies, through visit at the applicant institution, the observance of the standards for areas and criteria provided by Art. 10 of the Government Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended. The verification results are registered by the members of the Commission in the “The Study Visit Record (*in View of Granting the Provisional Authorization 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 Authorization to Operate*”, in which they propose and propose, with their signature, the of granting or not granting of the provisional authorization to operate for the structure for which the authorization has been requested;

c) the Evaluation Report written by experts is submitted for analysis to the ARACIS department specialized in the fundamental science domain which the education structure submitted for evaluation corresponds to. The ARACIS specialized department (*permanent specialty commission/accreditation department*) validates the experts’ report by verifying the observance of the methodology for external evaluation, and then submit it to the ARACIS Council in order to be discussed and validated;

d) Based on the discussion conclusions, the ARACIS Council draft the “Council’s Report” and submit it to the Ministry of National Education together with the proposal (*advise*) for granting or, where applicable, not granting the provisional authorization to operate for the applicant education structure. The proposal for granting or not granting the provisional authorization to operate is validated by vote of the members of the Council. Half plus one of the total number of members of the Council must agree with the respective proposal (*advise*), in order to validate it. The report has to bear the signature of the members of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council;

e) The Ministry of National Education, based on the ARACIS Council’s advise drafts the project of the Government Decision and submits it to the Government in order for the

latter to issue the Government Decision on granting the provisional authorization to operate.

f) if, while carrying out the annual monitoring of the study programs provisionally authorized to operate, it is found that, following the first two years of operation, the institution has failed to meet the standards considered when issuing the authorization and to take the necessary measures in view of accreditation, the ARACIS Council may propose to the Ministry of National Education to withdraw the provisional authorization to operate granted to the respective higher education structure.

2. The *methodology for accreditation* of a study program or any higher education structure requires the following successive working stages:

a) based on the request for initiating the procedure for external evaluation and accreditation, submitted to the ARACIS Department for Accreditation by the education provider, the ARACIS 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 does not exceed two years. In case the deadline is not observed, the delay is sanctioned by cancelling the provisional authorization to operate, as per art. 31, lit.(c) of the Government Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended;

- the education provider has submitted the request for launching the procedure for the education structure for which the accreditation/periodic evaluation is requested;

- the education provider proves with documents that the fee required by law for the accreditation/periodic evaluation has been paid;

- the education provider has submitted the internal evaluation report (*self evaluation report*), drafted in compliance with the provisions of art. 10 of the Government Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended;

- the external evaluation contract has been signed by both parties.

b) the accreditation department of ARACIS appoints a commission consisting of three-four experts in evaluation and accreditation, selected from the ARACIS National Registry of Evaluators, who are specialized in the field of the higher education structure submitted for evaluation. The commission also includes a student who is on the ARACIS National Registry of Student Evaluators. This Commission analyzes the internal evaluation report and verifies, through visits to the applicant institution, the observance of the standards for areas and criteria provided by Art. 10 of the Government Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended. The verification results are registered by the members of the Commission in the “Record of the Study Visit (*in View of Accreditation/Periodic Evaluation*)”, which is signed by all members of the Commission. Based on the “Record of the Study Visit in View of Accreditation/Periodic Evaluation”, the members of the commission elaborate “The Evaluation Report in View of Accreditation” in which they propose, and endorse with their signature, the granting or, where applicable, the non-granting of the accreditation to the education structure for which the accreditation has been requested;

c) the Evaluation Report elaborated by experts is submitted for analysis to the ARACIS department specialized in the fundamental science field to which the higher education structure submitted for evaluation pertains (*permanent specialty commission/accreditation department*), which validates the experts' report by verifying the observance of the evaluation methodology and submits the report to the ARACIS Council in order to be discussed and validated.

d) based on the discussion conclusions, the ARACIS Council draft the "*Council's Report*" and submit it to the Ministry of National Education together with the proposal (*advise*) for granting or, where applicable, not granting the accreditation to 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 must agree with the respective proposal (*advise*), in order to validate it. The report has to bear the signature of the members of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council;

e) the Ministry of National Education, based on the ARACIS Council's favorable advise, drafts the Government Decision and submits it to the Government in order for the latter to issue the Government Decision on granting the accreditation to respective study program. In the case of higher education providers, the accreditation of institutions, respectively of universities, is made by Law promoted by the Government, at the initiative of the Ministry of National Education, and based on the ARACIS favorable advise;

f) for the periodic evaluation, if ARACIS finds that the quality standards are not met, it informs the Ministry of National Education, which applies the provision of art. 34 of the Government Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved as amended through Law no. 87/2006 as amended. In the interval between two successive evaluations, as established by the law, ARACIS organizes periodic monitoring visits for external evaluation - follow-up, analyzing of the implementation of the quality assurance criteria and standards.

4.4 The accreditation of Master's Degree Awarding Institutions - MDAI.

Master's Degree study programs are organized in the following fundamental fields (*domains*): 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 (*domain*) can cover a number of specializations or Master's (*studies*) programs. At the same time, disciplinary or interdisciplinary Master's programs may be organized. The profile of a Master's Degree (*studies*) program can be one *of research*, in the sense of thoroughly studying a disciplinary scientific field (*domain*); of *complementarity*, in the sense of interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary studying of a scientific field, of *professionalization*, in the sense of acquiring professional competences in a specialized field, or it can be a *didactic* master's program, focused mainly on training teaching competences.

In view of accrediting a higher education institution which offers Master's Degree programs (*MDAI/IOSUD*), the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators presented in Part II of this **Methodology** apply. These are particularized in the self-evaluation report for each field of specialization, and, within the latter, for each study program/specialization or Master's domain (*field*) program.

Only accredited higher education institutions have the right to organize Master study

cycles.

The standards required for accrediting programs of the Licence study cycle must be also considered in the accreditation of programs of the Master study cycle, together with the following requirements:

a) for the accreditation of a Master study program, the applicant must prove that:

- the teaching and research mission undertaken is justified by elements of relevance and opportunity in accordance with the national qualifications framework and with the requirements of the labor market, and addresses teaching and scientific research objectives;
- the teaching and scientific research mission undertaken corresponds to and is integrated into the profile and specialization of the respective higher education institution;

a) for the accreditation of a Master study program all teaching positions established in compliance 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*), lecturer (*or equivalent*) holding a Doctoral Degree in the field of the teaching position, out of which at least 80% are tenured or non-tenured teaching staff of the HEI. At least 50% of the teaching staff conducting fully assisted teaching activities need to conduct these activities as HEI tenured staff. At least 50% of the disciplines in the curriculum, fully assisted, included in the Teaching Staff Roster if the HEI, are chaired by teaching staff with the rank of university professor or associate professor. Maximum 20% of the total number of teaching staff involved in a Master's study program can be covered with nationally or internationally renowned specialists from research, education, social and economic life in the field of the master's program.

b) the higher education institution has its own adequately equipped research laboratories in the field of the Master study program for which has applied for accreditation.

In view of accrediting a Master study program, 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.

The external evaluation of the Master's studies domains (*fields*) is conducted in compliance with the regulations in force, including those approved by the ARACIS Council.

4.5 The accreditation of Doctoral Degree Awarding Institutions (DDAI) and of the doctoral degree fields

The evaluation of the third cycle of university studies, organized in doctoral schools, shall be conducted in compliance with a specific distinct procedure which will be drafted in compliance with the regulations in force.