



Date: 11.05.2011

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

Dear dr. Hopbach,

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

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

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

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

- *Administrative procedures.* The agency has developed an Internal Quality Assurance Manual of Procedures which covers all the administrative aspects of the current activities (see annex 2 – an outline; the full working document is in Romanian). The internal QA system is now clearly described. The full implementation is now in progress in a step-by-step procedure since it has to be correlated to the evolution of some external factors: a) The new Methodology of evaluation, which is now being developed as part of the Project *Asigurarea calității în învățământul superior din România în context European. Dezvoltarea managementului calității academice la nivel de sistem și instituțional – ACADEMIS (Quality Assurance in the European Context. Development of Quality Management at System and Institutional Level)* funded from EU structural funds. The project deadline is in October 2011. The Methodology will include the requirements of the new Law of national education No.1/2011 which refer to ARACIS. In that sense, the agency will become also responsible for evaluating quality assurance for Master domains (in addition to the Master study programs) as well as for doctoral study programs, and in the future will become involved in the classification of universities. The new law of education also opens the possibility for other agencies listed in the EQAR to perform evaluations in Romania and specifies a number of additional activities for ARACIS with respect to the Law 87/2006 which remains in force as the specific legislation for ARACIS. b) At the moment we are



completing this progress report, one important modification of the Law 87/2006 and of the Government Decision 1257/2005 which are the legal background for the functioning of ARACIS, has been approved by the Romanian Parliament. The modification empowers ARACIS to better match its number of permanent staff positions (at the moment max. 35 full staff) to its evolving working demand and to include students as full members of the Council (until now they had observer status). In the same time, the agency is now able to start the procedures for ownership of new more adequate premises. (annex 3)

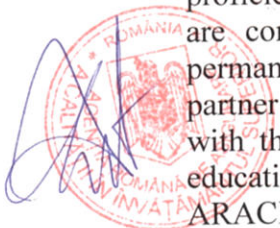
- *Quality of the external evaluations.* To improve quality, for the external evaluators listed in the Register of external evaluators of ARACIS a first *Manual for evaluating quality of university study programs (Manualul evaluatorului calitatii programelor de studii universitare)* authored by M. Alamoreanu,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

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

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

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

- *Quality of permanent staff.* The quality of the activity of permanent staff has been monitored by several procedures which are stipulated in the Romanian legislation. As a result of this process, which is performed on a yearly basis, but also when there are special requirements, one staff member had to leave the agency in April 2011 since the level of performance was considered un-satisfactory at all three evaluations. The proficiency in English of the staff is also under attention, the English classes for staff are continuing on a permanent basis and are supported by the agency. Several permanent staff participated in study visits organized by the agency to our ENQA partner agencies, in which other stakeholders were invited to take part in order to help with the understanding of other European experience in quality assurance in higher education and application of the ESGs. (see in annex 5 the list of agencies visited by ARACIS delegations under the frame of the project ACADEMIS)





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

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

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

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

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

The insure **participation of stakeholders** in view to incorporate views from outside the community the agency took action and organized its own Standing committee of employers,



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

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

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

Your sincerely,

Prof. Ioan Curtu

President,
ARACIS

