



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

SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT 2017

For renewal of Full Membership with ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)
and
For renewal of ARACIS listing within the EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education)

Bucharest, November 2017

www.aracis.ro



Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Development of the self-assessment report (SAR)	3
3. Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of the agency	5
4. History, profile and activities of the agency	5
5. Higher education quality assurance activities of the agency	8
6. Processes and their methodologies	8
7. Agency's internal quality assurance	11
8. Agency's international activities.....	13
9. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 3)	15
10. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 2)	25
11. Information and opinions of stakeholders.....	45
12. Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and agency's resulting follow-up (for second and subsequent reviews only)	46
13. SWOT analysis and ARACIS priorities	56
14. Current challenges and areas for future development/assumed deadlines.....	60
Glossary of Terms	62
List of Annexes.....	63



1. Introduction

According to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015), “Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG”. For The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) this review is the third external review; the first review took place in 2009 and the second review in 2013.

This is the first Self-Assessment Report (SAR) written according to the provisions of the “Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews” approved in 2016. SAR is an important occasion for the Agency to analyze carefully its actions and its activities from the last five years and to identify more clearly the challenges and the areas for future development.

Between the two external reviews, ARACIS has made significant progress such as the improvement of the work of its external evaluators through the organization of many training sessions, the extension of the involvement of students in its evaluation activities, the increase of the visibility and a better knowledge of the Agency mission at national level, the development of the international dimension of the Agency with the involvement in international projects, participation at international workshops, fora, international evaluation activities. Moreover, ARACIS made several studies and analyzes which were finalised with public reports. Also, the Agency edited the “Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education” that contains articles contributed by Romanian and foreign academics and other persons involved in quality assurance activity.

The Agency was established in 2005, according to the legal provisions of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved by the Law no. 87/2006, with subsequent amendments and completions, thereafter referred to as the “Law” (Annex 1.1; Note: the text of Law is presented in an integrated form, as it is in force at the moment this SAR was drafted, to include all subsequent modifications of the original version of the Law). Other additional legal provisions regarding ARACIS were introduced by the Law of National Education no. 1/2011, with subsequent amendments and completions (Annex 1.2; the text is presented in an integrated form, as it is in force at the moment this SAR was drafted, to include all subsequent amendments; only the legal provisions on quality assurance and ARACIS are presented).

ARACIS’s mission is, according to the Law, to assess the quality of the study programs (SPs), master study domains and higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as to contribute, together with the HEIs, to a continuous enhancement of quality. The agency is also aiming at contributing to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality.

The agency was evaluated between 2005 and 2017 on different occasions, by several panels and organisations: Independent evaluation of ARACIS activity during 2006-2007¹; EUA external evaluation - 2008²; ESU external evaluation – 2008³; ENQA coordinated reviews - 2009, 2013⁴. Recommendations of the 2009 ENQA coordinated review were analyzed in the 2013 second ENQA coordinated review. The recommendations of the 2009 review were properly addressed, as it can be concluded from the judgments of the 2013 ENQA Report (see Annex 9.3). Addressing the recommendations of the 2013 review is presented in Section 12.

¹ Independent evaluation, 2006-2007:

http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Capacitatea_Institutionala/Raport_Monitorizare_02.pdf (in Romanian)

² EUA external evaluation, 2008:

http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Capacitatea_Institutionala/Raport_EUA_evaluare_ARACIS_01.pdf

³ ESU external evaluation, 2008:

http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Capacitatea_Institutionala/ESU_External_Review_on_ARACIS_01.pdf

⁴ ENQA coordinated reviews - 2009, 2013: <http://www.aracis.ro/en/aracis/institutional-capacity/>



The results of all the external evaluations of the agency were consistent, leading to similar judgments, namely substantial compliance of the agency and its activity to ESG. ARACIS is listed in the EQAR since 2009.

2. Development of the self-assessment report (SAR)

This Self-Assessment Report (SAR) has been drafted by the Working Group (WG) nominated by the ARACIS Council. The members of the Working Group, as per Table 2.1 below, endorse the content of the SAR. The WG, as well as other persons, contributed also to the revision of ARACIS current procedures and to the development of new ones, such as those related to evaluation of master domains, cross border evaluations in Republic of Moldova, evaluating engineering study programs to award EUR-ACE Label. Reference on their valuable contribution in the activity of the Working Group and sub-groups is presented also in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Given Name/ Family Name	Position/role in the WG/revision of procedures
Iordan Petrescu	General coordination Sub-group Leader - evaluation of master studies domain Work Package
Cristina Ghițulică	Coordination Revision of Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct
Radu-Mircea Damian	Operational Coordination of Activity of the WG: Consistency of SAR, Terminology, Methodology/Procedures Compliance to ESG. Drafting preliminary version of SAR. Analysis of proposals. Revision of final version
Simona Lache	Procedures/EUR-ACE Label
Ioan Ianoș, Vasilica Stan	Methodology/Procedures. Revision of Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct
Mădălin Bunoiu	Profile of agency, Historical Synopsis, Activity
Adrian Opre, Neculai Seghedin	Revision of Complaints and Appeals Procedures
Iamandi Luca	Cross Border Evaluation in Republic of Moldova
Representatives of stakeholders	
Vlad Cherecheș	Student Federation – National Alliance of Student Organizations of Romania (ANOSR)
Nicolae Tunsoiu	Student Federation – National Union of Students of Romania (UNSR)
Anton Hadăr	Trade Unions in Education – National Trade Unions Federation “Alma Mater” Evaluation of master studies domain Work Package
Ion Stănciulescu	National Communications Studies and Research Institute (INSCC Bucharest), General Director - Representative of Employers
ARACIS Administrative Staff	
Adina Nică (Ghidura)	Methodology/Procedures/Communication
Adriana Popoiu	Methodology/Procedures/Communication
Carmen Mirian	Methodology/Procedures
Mihaela Băjenaru	Methodology/Procedures
Mihai Marcu	Methodology/Annexes
Cristina Busuioc	Methodology/Annexes
Ion Tănase	Economic Resources
Marinela Lolea	Human Resources
Geanina Buiuc	Internal Quality Assurance: Revisiting, Improving and Developing new IQA procedures

At some stages of the work, the Council decided upon some modifications of the composition and tasks to be performed by the WG and sub-groups. The composition and tasks of the persons in the WG were formalized by



decisions of the Executive Board and the Council in November 2016 and revised/up-dated on 07.09.2017 to include other persons who contributed to the final form of the report.

The Council decided that the WG should work in parallel on:

- draft a proposal of a new revised version of the **Methodology**, to be presented to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE – Note: the name of the ministry has changed several times between 2013 and 2017) and further to be approved by Government Decision, according to the Law (Art. 17-(1));
- developing new procedures for external evaluation of master study domains in accordance with ESG;
- revise the procedure for awarding EUR-ACE Label to engineering study programs; this activity included drafting the Self Evaluation Report for the periodic external evaluation of ARACIS to be performed by European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAAEE) for reauthorization of ARACIS to award European Quality Label for Engineering Degree Programs (EUR-ACE Label);
- draft the SAR, following in parallel the work in progress of drafting and approving the revised ARACIS regulations and procedures to fully include the provisions of ESG 2015.

These activities were assigned by the Council to sub-groups of the WG, which consulted with representatives of stakeholders. The partial results were permanently presented to the Executive Board and to the Council. The SAR refers also to the documents which have been produced and approved by the Council. The other new regulations, approved by Government Decision or Ministerial Order, are also considered in relation with external evaluations. In the sub-group for developing the SAR, the contribution of the representative in the Council of the trade union in higher education was significant. The activity of the commission of employers was concentrated on specific standards.

The draft of the SAR was discussed with the National Qualifications Authority, before being approved by the ARACIS Council. The final version of the draft of the SAR was approved by decision of the Council on **27 November 2017**, to be sent to ENQA for pre-screening.

Terminology

The **terminology** used in the SAR by the WG was chosen to be compatible with Romanian regulations in quality assurance. Following the practice used in drafting the 2013 Self Evaluation Report - SER of ARACIS, the WG endorsed for the SAR a simplified terminology, closer to the specificity of the Romanian language. It is well known that, in English, terms such as audit, review, assessment or evaluation do not have identical connotation/meaning, in the sense they are not equivalent and, moreover, they cannot be directly and accurately translated into Romanian. Their general meaning in Romanian corresponds mainly to the (Romanian) word “*evaluare*”, which is used in the Romanian Law (in English: “evaluation”).

On the other hand, translation in English of the Romanian word “*evaluare*” as “audit”, “review”, “assessment”, “evaluation” is by no means easy and straightforward. Therefore, to avoid confusion, in the ARACIS *Methodology for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference, and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* - approved by the Government Decision nr. 1418/ 2006 (Annex 2.1 - to be referred further as the *Methodology*) and in other documents/procedures etc., the word “*evaluare*” is used to define a complex process, to be differentiated of „control”. In the English versions of ARACIS documents (including this SAR) the word “evaluation” was kept as a general concept to cover all the understandings of the other English aforementioned words, which could be considered largely equivalent. However, in the Annexes, the words “audit”, “review”, “assessment”, “evaluation” might be met in the translations into English of some Romanian documents, performed by other persons outside ARACIS, such as of the Law, the *Methodology* etc.



3. Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of the agency

The structure of higher education in Romania is regulated by the Law of National Education (see Annex 1.2). The Romanian Higher Education System is coordinated by the Ministry of National Education. According to the Law of National Education, the Romanian Higher Education System includes all the accredited higher education institutions: universities, academies, institutes, higher education schools and others. Higher education institutions may be public or private, or confessional institutions.

In the academic year 2016-2017, there are 101 accredited higher education institutions (HEIs), of which 55 are state HEIs and 46 private HEIs. Romania participates in the Bologna Process since it's launching in 1999 and the national legislative framework has been adapted since then in order to meet the requirements of the European Higher Education Area.

Since the 2005-2006 academic year, the Romanian Higher Education System has the following structure:

- 1st cycle, Bachelor's degree ("Licență" - level 6 of the European Qualifications Framework) – 3 study years (180 ECTS) or 4 study years (240 ECTS) for some programs, such as Law and Engineering;
- EU regulated professions, with long programs (level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework) of 5 study years (300 ECTS) or 6 study years (360 ECTS) such as: Medicine, Pharmaceutical, Dental, Veterinary or Architecture study programs;
- 2nd cycle, Master's degree ("Masterat" - level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework) – up to 2 study years (60 – 120 ECTS);
- 3rd cycle, Doctoral studies ("Doctorat" - level 8 of the European Qualifications Framework) – 3 study years. For the 3rd cycle, the ECTS workload is decided by the universities. Full-time or part-time doctoral studies correspond to 3 years' work time.

Quality Assurance in education – including higher education – is regulated by Law (see Annexes 1.1 and 1.2), as "primary legislation". Subsequent regulation, as "secondary", includes Government Decisions, which approve the **Methodology** and other aspects related to the structure of HE system. Other "secondary regulation", based on ARACIS QA external evaluations, is approved, either by Government Decisions, such as the annual approval of the structure of the study programs in Romanian HEIs (i.e. for the academic year 2016-2017), or by Ministerial Orders. HEIs are fully in charge and responsible for their Internal QA processes and activity, according to ESG and the national legislation. For its current external evaluation of QA activities, ARACIS develops its own detailed procedures which are included in the Guide⁵ (see Annex 2.2).

External QA-activities of ARACIS are described in Section 5 of the SAR.

4. History, profile and activities of the agency

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is known by the Romanian acronym ARACIS which stands (in Romanian) for „**Agencia Română pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior**”, referred to thereafter as **ARACIS / the Agency**. The Agency started to function in 2005, being instituted by Law (Annex 1.1). According to the Law – Art.16 (1), “ARACIS is an autonomous public institution of national interest, a legal entity with own income and expenses budget”.

The Law provides the framework regarding quality assurance in education at all levels. The concept of quality assurance is defined, together with the concept and understanding/meaning of the term “accreditation” in

⁵ http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/Part_I_-_STUDY_PROGRAMMES_ACCREDITATION.pdf



Romanian education and, particularly, in higher education. The Law was approved by the Romanian Parliament, its provision being in accordance with the ESG. The Law stipulates at Art. 20 that ARACIS „inherits all contractual rights and obligations of the former National Council for Evaluation and Accreditation (Romanian acronym: CNEAA), as well as its technical infrastructure, staff and databases”. By virtue of this provision, ARACIS undertook at the beginning both CNEAA’s achievements and some shortcomings which had to be addressed; details were presented in the SERs drafted for previous reviews of the agency.

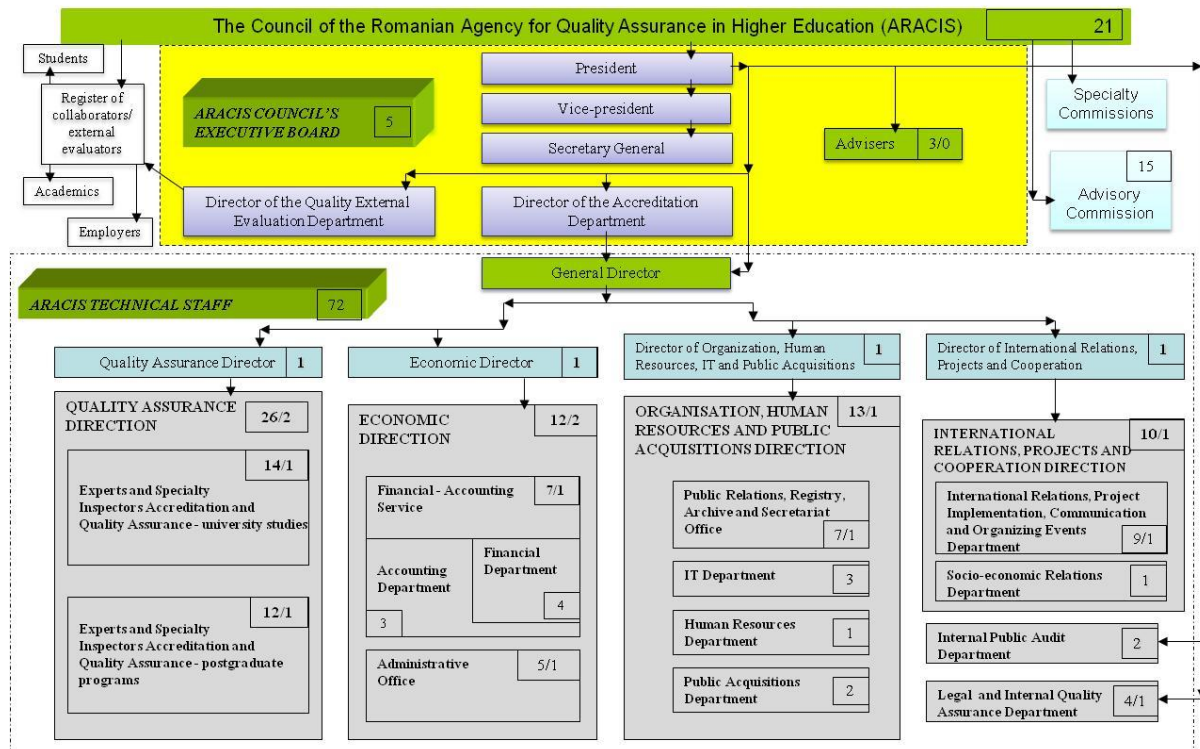
Subsequent amendments of the Law, referring to quality assurance and ARACIS, aimed at strengthening the independence of the agency in its decisions taking process, organization and funding. Modifications of the Law allowed ARACIS to include students and other stakeholders as members of the Council and to adapt the number of Council members and staffing to the volume of agency activity (see more details at section 9.5 ESG, compliance with Standard 3.5 Resources).

At present, the Agency is led by a Council of 21 members (see also Section 9.5). Rectors and any other persons holding high official positions within the Presidency, the Government or the Parliament cannot be members of the Council of ARACIS, in order to ensure complete independence and to avoid political influence.

By Law, five of the Council members are Executive Board members, which is the structure that has to ensure the day-to-day management routine of the Agency. Two of the five members of the Executive Board, the President of the Council and the Vice-president, are elected by their peers via a secret voting procedure. The other three members of the Board are appointed by the President and serve as Directors of Departments (Accreditation and External Quality Evaluation, respectively) and Secretary General. The present organizational structure of the agency is given in Figure 4. The previous organizational structure of the agency is given in Annex 5.

Figure 4

ORGANISATION CHART OF THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION





By the effect of the Law, ARACIS should apply for inclusion in EQAR and has to be the subject of periodic international external evaluation (see Annex 1.1. Art. 22 (1),(2)). ARACIS became registered in the EQAR since September 2009. Renewal of registration was granted in 2013.

Regarding the profile of the agency, the competences of ARACIS have been defined by the provisions of the Law (see Annex 1.1. Art. 17 (1)), which are the background of its mission.

The quality assurance activities of the agency are described in Section 5 of the SAR.

It is important to underline that external quality assurance in Romania is of a comprehensive nature, including evaluation of study programs (SPs), institutions and master study domains. In addition, ARACIS is to proceed to the external evaluation/accreditation of the third cycle of university studies (doctoral). This activity has not yet started, due to some delays in adopting a new legislation and therefore it is not included in the terms of reference of the present external review. Since ARACIS works in the national context, it has the obligation to periodic develop/up-date its Methodology and accreditation standards for different types of programs and higher education providers. The **Methodology** should be endorsed by the MoNE and approved then by Government Decision. In compliance with the Law - Annex 1.1, Art. 17 (1), a), ARACIS developed the revised **Methodology** which was sent to the MoNE (see also Section 6, 9.1 ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance).

The importance of ARACIS, as an institution and activities, in the Romanian normative HE context, is probably better underlined by quoting the Law (see Annex 1.1., Art. 17 (1), b)): "to assess based on standards and methodology approved by Government Decisions, upon request or of its own initiative, and to propose the authorization, respectively the accreditation of higher education providers and their study programs. On the basis of the accreditation reports, the Ministry of Education and Research elaborates the normative acts for the establishment of higher education structures".

An important activity of the agency, with significant relevance for the HEIs and the stakeholders is, since 2009, drafting and publishing system-wide and thematic analyzes. Several such documents, under the title "Quality Barometer", were published in 2009⁶ and 2010⁷. The most recent issue was published in Romanian in 2015 and was translated in English in 2016⁸. In accordance with the ESG 2015, the Quality Barometer includes a thematic analysis on the perception of ARACIS activity with the stakeholders (see Section 9.4 of the SAR).

Other activity at national level include: drafting proposals for adapting methodologies to new requirements of the Law of national education - 2011 (Annex 1.2) (additional work is in progress see Section 14 – QAFIN project); co-operation with the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC) and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), co-operation with the National Rector's Council, with HE institutions, student federations and community of employers.

Activity at international level is described in Section 8 of the SAR.

⁶ Quality Barometer 2009: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Comunicate_Media/Engleza_-_Interior.pdf

⁷ Quality Barometer 2010: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/Publicatii_ARACIS/Engleza/sinteza-barometru-en.pdf

⁸ Quality Barometer 2016: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/2017/Quality_Barometer_2016_EN.rar



5. Higher education quality assurance activities of the agency

The QA external evaluation activities of the agency are summarized in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1

QA external evaluation activities of the agency: synopsis		
Type of external evaluation	Code of activity in SAR	Comments
1. Provisional authorizing to operate	1.1 Study programs (SPs) (Bachelor/"Licență") 1.2 HE institutions	Performed on a regular basis, as per legal provisions
2. Accreditation	2.1 Study programs (Bachelor/"Licență"; Master) 2.2 HE institutions 2.3 Master studies domains	
3. Periodic (cyclical) evaluation	3.1 Study programs (Bachelor/"Licență"; Master) 3.2 HE institutions 3.3 Master studies domains	
4. EUR-ACE Label Awarding	4. Evaluation of Engineering Study Programs	<i>Occasional activity</i> , upon request/contract with Romanian HEIs. EUR-ACE Label awarded by ARACIS, according to agreement with ENAEE
5. International/cross-border evaluation	5. Evaluation of 17 Law Study Programs in R. of Moldova	<i>Occasional activity</i> performed in R. of Moldova, upon request/contract based. ARACIS evaluation considered also provisions of legislation in the country where the study programs were offered. Note: based on ARACIS Report Accreditation/Reaccreditation was granted as per foreign partner country legislation

Between 2014 and October 2017, ARACIS has carried out on a permanent basis a total number of 2.388 external quality evaluation activities, which represent the core of its mission: 1.796 Bachelor study programs - "licență"; 518 Master study programs – "masterat"; 74 institutional evaluations. Detailed information regarding the evaluations carried out by ARACIS during 01.01.2014 - 30.10.2017 is presented in Annex 3.

6. Processes and their methodologies

The **core function** of ARACIS is to undertake external QA activities **on a regular basis**, as specified in Part 2 of the ESG. In Table 5.1, these are namely **Activities 1, 2, 3**. Activities 4 and 5, which are occasional, are also performed according to ESG, with particular specific provisions related to ENAEE procedures (activity 4) and EQAR recommendations for cross-border evaluations (activity 5).

The processes and criteria of the external evaluation activities 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2 of the agency, as per Table 5.1, are defined as per Table 6.1 below. The ARACIS **Methodology** and Guide are designed or revised in correlation with modifications/completions of the Law and/or with other Government Decisions regarding Higher Education. The Sequencing of these activities is synthetically described also in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

NATIONAL REGULATIONS		
Quality Assurance Domains for QA of education providers in Higher Education, as per the Law		
A. Institutional Capacity	B. Effectiveness of Education	C. Internal Quality Management
<i>Criteria, Standards and Performance indicators, as per ARACIS Methodology, Guide and Council decisions (Council decisions may clarify, amend or complete the Guide in accordance with new national regulations – including Specific standards/ study domains)</i>		
<i>Criteria and Standards (A) (as specified by ARACIS)</i>	<i>Criteria and Standards (B) (as specified by ARACIS)</i>	<i>Criteria and Standards (C) (as specified by ARACIS)</i>
<i>Performance indicators (A) (as specified by ARACIS)</i>	<i>Performance indicators (B) (as specified by ARACIS)</i>	<i>Performance indicators (C) (as specified by ARACIS)</i>
Sequencing of the core activities undertaken on a regular basis		
HE Provider: Application for external evaluation by ARACIS (Applicants for authorizing new First cycle study programs and accreditation of new master study programs should present the opportunity agreement of the National Qualifications Authority). Contract signed by the two parties. Self Evaluation Report (SER) of Study Program or HEI submitted to ARACIS.		
ARACIS: Nomination of External Evaluation Panel for the site visit (EEP). Analysis of SER by EEP		
ARACIS: Site visit by EEP		
Complaints procedure (if any). Analysis by ARACIS: conclusion; action taken, according to the case.		
ARACIS: CONCLUSIONS of the EVALUATION: - preliminary, moderation procedures – interaction with HE provider representatives, students, other stakeholders		
ARACIS: JUDGMENT. Advise to be sent to the MoNE after final judgment. Informing the HE provider		
Appeals procedure. Conclusions. Action taken. Decision		
ARACIS: FINAL REPORT: communication of results to HE provider and Ministry of National Education		
ARACIS: PUBLICATION OF REPORT		
ARACIS and HE Provider: FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES		

Accreditation and periodic evaluation of master studies domains, which became also part of the **core activity on a regular basis** of ARACIS (activities 2.3 and 3.3 as per Table 5.1) is performed according to more recently developed regulations, included in the legislative framework in the ARACIS procedures. After the previous 2013 ENQA co-ordinated review, information and answers to requested clarifications are presented in Section 12 of the SAR, in connection with the Substantive Changes Report presented to EQAR in March, 2016. The external evaluation of master studies domains in view of accreditation/periodic evaluation follows the provisions of the “Procedures for accreditation and periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees”⁹ and

⁹ Procedures for accreditation and periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees (in Romanian): http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Proceduri/2017/Proceduri_privind_evaluarea_domeniilor_de_master_-_modificat_1_iunie_2017_-_de_afisat_pe_site.pdf



of the “Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees”¹⁰. This activity has not yet started – it is scheduled to start in 2018.

The EQAR eligibility confirmation letter includes the following: "We further note that ARACIS will develop procedures for the recognition of external quality assurance activities of other quality assurance bodies following the ruling of the Romanian Minister of National Education and Scientific Research (no. 6154/2016). If the procedures are developed before November 2017, they should be addressed as part of the external review of ARACIS, thus making it unnecessary to be raised again in a Substantive Change Report." These procedures have not been developed yet, as the agency has not received from the ministry any report of external evaluation in Romania of a foreign EQAR listed agency. After they shall be drafted, these specific procedures shall be presented in a Substantive Change Report.

The processes and criteria of the external evaluation Activity 4 (**occasional**) of the agency, as per Table 5.1, are sequenced as per Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2

External evaluation sequencing of study programs in Engineering Sciences and for awarding of EUR-ACE certification
Accredited HE institution: Application for external evaluation by ARACIS, in view of granting the EUR-ACE certification, together with the application for the regular external evaluation of Engineering study programs. Contract signed by the two parties. Self Evaluation Report (SER) of Study Program or HEI submitted to ARACIS. Self-evaluation Report (and annexes): forwarded to ARACIS by the institution (as applicant) with information which allows the evaluation of compliance with ENAEE standards – according to Guidelines for self-evaluation of study programs and external evaluation in view of obtaining the EUR-ACE® certification ¹¹ .
ARACIS: Nomination of External Evaluation Panel for the site visit (EEP), proposed by the Permanent Specialty Commissions of Engineering Sciences (1 and 2) from the National Register of Evaluators and with 1-2 members of National Register of employers and one student. Analysis of SER by EEP. Evaluation to be carried out according to ARACIS Methodology and to ENAEE Standards and Guidelines for self-evaluation of study programs and external evaluation in view of obtaining the EUR-ACE® certification
ARACIS: Site visit by EEP
Complaints procedure (if this is the case). Analysis by ARACIS: conclusion; action taken, according to the case.
ARACIS: CONCLUSIONS of the EVALUATION: - preliminary, moderation procedures – interaction with HEI representatives, students, other stakeholders; at least one member of ARACIS National Register of employers, member of the visit panel, participates in the meeting of the Engineering Permanent Specialty Commission. Conclusion: judgment on fulfilment of ENAEE standards and conclusions regarding the awarding/non-awarding of EUR-ACE certification
Appeals procedure. Conclusions. Action taken. Decision
ARACIS: FINAL REPORT: communication of results to HE provider
ARACIS: PUBLICATION OF REPORT
ARACIS: PROCEDURES for AWARDING THE EUR-ACE Certification

¹⁰ Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/2017/Guideline_for_periodic_external_evaluation_of_the_fields_of_study_for_the_Master_degrees.pdf

¹¹ Guidelines for self-evaluation of study programmes and external evaluation for obtaining the EUR-ACE® certification: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Proceduri/2017/ARACIS_ENAEE_Guidelines_for_self_evaluation_EN.pdf



The processes and criteria of the external evaluation Activity 5 (**occasional**) of the agency, as per Table 5.1, are presented in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3

Drafting and signing the Contract between the Ministry of Education of R. of Moldova (as beneficiary) and ARACIS (as contractor)
Ministry of Education of R. of Moldova:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sending to ARACIS the regulations for external evaluation in force in R. of Moldova - sending to ARACIS the Self-evaluation Reports of the 17 Law Study programs
<p>ARACIS: analysis of regulations for external evaluation in force in R. of Moldova; drafting procedure to make the evaluation compatible with ARACIS ESG – based Methodology</p> <p>ARACIS and M. of Education of R. of Moldova: Common agreement with the evaluation procedure</p> <p>M. of Education of R. of Moldova: approval of the Methodology by Ministerial Order</p>
<p>ARACIS: nomination of visit panels; site visit of ARACIS panels; Reports of panels drafted and discussed by the ARACIS Law Permanent Specialty Commission; Report of the Law Permanent Specialty Commission Report of the Council: approved and send to the Ministry of Education of R. of Moldova</p>
<p>Ministry of Education of R. of Moldova: Observations sent to ARACIS - acceptance of first results for 13 Study programs; request for an additional review for 4 Study programs (“Appeals procedure” requesting re-evaluation)</p>
<p>ARACIS: nomination of new visit panels for 4 Study programs; site visit of ARACIS panels; Reports of panels drafted and discussed by the ARACIS Law Permanent Specialty Commission; Report of the Permanent Specialty Commission for Law Study programs; Report of the Council: approved and sent to the Ministry of Education of R. of Moldova</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Ministry of Education of R. of Moldova: acceptance of the ARACIS Report for all 17 Study programs</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">ARACIS: drafting of the Comprehensive Report, as per the contract; sending the Comprehensive Report to the Ministry of Education of R. of Moldova</p>
ARACIS: PUBLICATION OF COMPREHENSIVE REPORT

7. Agency’s internal quality assurance

The internal QA procedures are related to the structure of the agency, which is described at Section 9.5 of the SAR - compliance with ESG Standard 3.5 Resources. IQA include **external evaluation activity** and **administrative/ own staff activity**. Internal Quality Assurance is addressed also at Section 9.6 of the SAR – compliance with ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct. Details regarding selection of evaluators are given in Annex 7.

Requirements of ESG 2015 had a positive impact on the activity of the agency: the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct¹² was revised (see Annex 4.1). Quality of staff is firstly related to the procedure of inclusion of experts in the National Register of Evaluators, who are accepted only after going through an evaluation procedure described at Section 9.5 of the SAR.

To be included in the National Register of Evaluators, students should also follow and successfully complete a training session and evaluation procedure (see Annex 7.5).

The nomination procedure of academic experts for external evaluation missions is described in Annex 7.3. The nomination procedure of students for external evaluation missions is described in Annex 7.5. The nomination

¹² http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/2017/Code_of_ethics_and_rules_of_conduct_ARACIS_2017.pdf



procedure of foreign/international evaluators for institutional evaluation missions is described in Annex 7.4. The procedure for including academics in the Permanent Specialty Commissions is described in Annex 7.1 and the procedure for including students in the Permanent Specialty Commissions is described in Annex 7.2.

According to the organizational structure of the agency a specialized expert in IQA, carefully selected by competition was hired; IQA procedures were constantly revisited and revised, activity which was performed on a permanent basis.

The organization structure was further modified by decision of Council on 27.11.2017 and should become effective after this date. This new document is presented in Figure 4. The reason for the change is better compliance with Romanian legislative framework.

The internal QA procedures have been developed in accordance to Romanian general legislation on internal QA procedures for public institutions, to be also compatible with ESG. Quality is an attribute of the Agency's processes and structures essentially defined by the degree to which are met the expectations of beneficiaries and of quality standards. In this respect, ARACIS has set up an internal quality management system to comply with the ESG as well as with the Internal / Managerial Control Standards, obligatory for public institutions by provisions of specific national legislation.

By applying the quality management system, the management of ARACIS is committed to: meeting stakeholder requirements; providing the infrastructure and appropriate working environment for the proper operation of all the processes and resources needed to achieve the defined objectives; complying with the legislation applicable to the activities carried out; continuous improvement of the quality management system.

The evaluation of the internal quality assurance activity is conducted by the means of:

- periodic evaluations – monthly meetings of ARACIS Council members and of the Monitoring Commission¹³, weekly meetings of ARACIS Executive Board, for the analysis of the activity conducted in the period prior to the meetings;
- final evaluation – drafting of the Annual Activity Report of ARACIS;
- drafting of the Development program for the Internal/Managerial Control System and of the Operational plan for internal quality assurance, taking into account the weaknesses resulting from the self-assessment report.

The internal activity of the organizational structures of ARACIS is included in the internal procedures of the Agency, that concern the activity of the following departments: Experts and Specialty Inspectors Accreditation and Quality Assurance Office; Public Relations, Registry, Archive and Secretariat Office; International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Division; Human Resources Department; Legal Department; IT Department; Economic Division.

The Internal Quality Assurance Department was, until November 2017, under the coordination of the International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Division. The Internal Quality Assurance Department coordinates and provides the logistic support necessary to conduct current activities determined by quality management and quality assurance as well as by the internal/managerial control, having as a general objective the establishment of a culture of quality embraced by all members of the Agency. Details on IQA procedures are given in Annex 4.3.

Progress: IQA procedures have been better formalized and a specialized staff member was hired in a special IQA compartment. Permanent development and improved follow-up of IQA activities

¹³ ARACIS Monitoring Commission for the implementation and development of the Internal/Managerial Control System is established according to national legislation - Order no. 400/2015 of the Secretary General of the Government, with subsequent amendments and completions, for the approval of the Internal/Managerial Control Code of Public Entities. The Monitoring commission analyzes and approves the formal procedures and sends them for approval to the head of the public institution.



8. Agency's international activities

ARACIS is active "Full member" agency of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA since 2009. ARACIS has been registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – EQAR in 2009. Translation into Romanian of ESG 2015 was provided by ARACIS¹⁴.

ARACIS participated, over time, at various events organized by ENQA. Since the last ENQA coordinated review, ARACIS representatives attended: all ENQA General Assemblies; EUA/ENQA Members' Fora; meetings of ENQA Working Groups "Excellence in higher education", "Staff development" and "Internal Quality Assurance"; ENQA Seminar Reviews; "QACHE Expert Forum" organized in the project "Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education (QACHE)" (2014); the Conference "Future of Higher Education – Bologna Process Researchers" (2014); the Conference on QA of cross-border higher education (2015), ENQA seminars on "Quality Assurance in European Context" (2016 and 2017) etc. Also, ARACIS contributed to several surveys conducted by ENQA and to the ENQA Newsletter.

ARACIS representatives also attended events organized by EQAR, such as: EQAR Seminar (2014); "Members Dialogue" (2014, 2015, 2016), -project "Recognizing International Quality Assurance Activity in the EHEA" (RIQAA - Bayreuth 2014, Palermo 2015) and responded to the surveys conducted by EQAR (2016), aimed at studying the feasibility of a European database of higher education institutions and programs that have been subject to quality assurance by EQAR-registered agencies.

ARACIS is member of other international networks/organizations of agencies for quality assurance in higher education, such as: Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA); International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE); European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE).

CEENQA was established given the need of collaboration in quality assurance between neighbouring countries. Most of partners face similar problems from the point of view of education system, level of socio-economic development etc. ARACIS considered important to join the network, to enhance exchange of good practice, information as well as foster collaboration with QA agencies in this geographical area.

ARACIS considers important its participation in the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE) in view of the added-value for the Romanian graduates, brought by the EUR-ACE® Label. The Label can be awarded following the successful evaluation conducted by ARACIS of engineering first Cycle programs, at their own voluntary request. The external evaluation of ARACIS by ENAE, aiming to re-confirm the ARACIS capacity to award the label, is still in progress, as the first site-visit took place in November 2017, in Bucharest; the second site-visit shall take place in 2018.

ARACIS continued its membership with the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), as being important for international exchange of good practice. ARACIS contributed with articles to the INQAAHE Newsletter for the section "News from Members". In December 2016 the contribution of ARACIS referred to the ARACIS-ANACIP (R. of Moldova partner agency) collaboration. ARACIS has participated at several initiatives in quality assurance, such as seminars and workshops organized by AUF (Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie), in Romania (2014, 2015), R. of Moldova (2015, 2016), Lebanon (2017) etc.

The participation in the works of the European Quality Assurance Network for Informatics Education (EQANIE) was limited to the reception of information on the activity of the network. Membership in EQANIE was interrupted in 2016 but we hope that in the near future it could be resumed.

¹⁴ ESG 2015 in Romanian are available on ENQA website: <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/> and on ARACIS website: <http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG%20in%20Romanian.pdf>



Also, at the request and with the financial support of the Ministry of National Education, ARACIS, by its representatives, participated as members of the Romanian delegation in a series of events of Bologna Follow-up Group. The participation of ARACIS representatives at the work of BFUG reflects recognition by the Ministry of National Education of the important role of ARACIS in quality assurance in higher education in Romania in the European context.

During 2013 – 2016, ARACIS was beneficiary or partner in several EU funded quality assurance projects, presented below:

Between April 2014 – December 2015, ARACIS implemented the project *“Development and consolidation of quality culture in Romanian higher education system – QUALITAS”* (co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Sector Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013), in partnership with CEENQA., which facilitated the selection of foreign experts to take part at the external institutional evaluations.

The main results of the QUALITAS project were: external evaluation of 20 universities, the development of proposals for new indicators for the quality evaluation and compatibility at system level, system analysis of quality in the Romanian HE and stakeholders/beneficiaries perception of ARACIS activity, internationalization, exchange of good practices, communication in the Romanian HE, quality assurance (training sessions), publication of several brochures, including Quality Assurance Review of ARACIS etc.

Between April 2014 - November 2015, ARACIS implemented the project *ACAD-INOV - “Virtual Community for quality assurance and perfection of strategic and innovative management in technical and mixed universities for increasing the relevance of higher education for labour market”* (co-financed by the same abovementioned European Social Fund). The general objective of the project aimed at improvement of university management by developing managerial competences, strategic planning and communication competences for assurance of quality of education, for increasing the relevance of higher education for the labour market and for the knowledge-based society.

ARACIS was partner, between 2013 and 2016, in the project *“Analysis of impact of external quality assurance in higher education, pluralist methodology and implementation of a formative trans-disciplinary impact evaluation method (IMPALA)”* funded by the European Commission - Lifelong Learning Program. This project was coordinated by EVALAG (Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg, Germany). The partner institutions were QA agencies and universities from four countries (Spain, Finland, Romania, Germany), ENQA, ESU and Prof. Dr. Bjørn Stensaker (Norway) as consultant. The purpose of the project was “the development and implementation of a methodology for analysis of impact of external quality assurance procedures (External Quality Assurance - EQA) on higher education institutions” aiming to provide further information on the results, expectations, effects and impact of external quality assurance procedures in higher education in the partner universities.

Between 2013 – 2015, ARACIS was partner in the project *“The Automated Quality Control System (AQUA-TS)”* funded by the European Commission - Lifelong Learning Program; the project had the purpose of designing, building and implementing operational tools for the measurement and control of indicators of the type of those used in the External Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), in collaboration with the target groups and with the interested parties. Participation in the project offered ARACIS the opportunity to identify common points of external evaluation of QA for university study programs and VET programs, and address differences.

In 2017, ARACIS started to implement, as partner, three new projects; the activities and expected outcomes of these projects are described in section 14 of the SAR.

ARACIS developed bi-lateral collaboration with other international organizations and/or agencies in connection with quality assurance in higher education. Thus, ARACIS extended the collaboration relationships with other agencies: on 16 October 2014, the *Memorandum of cooperation* was signed between ARACIS and NEAA



(National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency) of Republic of Bulgaria and in March 2017 a similar agreement was signed with the National Agency for Professional Education (ANACIP) of the Republic of Moldova.

ARACIS paid special attention to co-operation with neighbouring countries. Prior to signing the co-operation agreement with ANACIP, the two quality assurance agencies started to promote and develop their relations. Through the Direction for International Relations, Projects and Co-operation (DRIPC), ARACIS experts adapted the evaluation **Methodology** with regulations in the Republic of Moldova, for the evaluation of Law Study programs in 17 universities of the Republic of Moldova (evaluation contract concluded , in 2014 between ARACIS and the Ministry of Education of Republic of Moldova).

The two agencies have been involved in several common activities, such as exchange of good-practice in external evaluation of study programs and HE institutions. In 2016, ARACIS was invited to participate with expertise in the project, run by the Educational Center PRO DIDACTICA of Chisinau, "Partnerships for Quality and Relevance in ICT Vocational Education in Moldova", funded by the Austrian Development Agency and the Romanian Government, for the time period December 2015 – November 2018.

9. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 3)

9.1 ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

ARACIS compliance

The mission statement of the agency, its goals and objectives are clearly stated and publicly available on the website: <http://www.aracis.ro/en/aracis/mission/>. The mission, goals and objectives are defined in accordance with the legislative frame work in force in Romania.

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

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

The HE providers in Romania are allowed to initiate and/or run educational activity in Romania under the framework of the Law (see Annex 1.1) and of the Law of National Education (see Annex 1.2). Any HE provider submitting to ARACIS an application for external evaluation should comply with legislative provisions, where the role and the scope of the activity of the agency are defined. Although the mission of ARACIS is public and published, it is however underlined and re-stated by the agency to the HE providers during the briefings/discussions with the representative of the HE provider applying for evaluations.

Criteria, standards and performance indicators are published on the webpage www.aracis.ro/proceduri, in Romanian. Since the webpage is permanently up-dated, one can find original versions of the documents as well as their subsequent modifications.



For **activities 1.1, 2.1, 3.1**, the external evaluation, in view of provisional authorizing to operate, accreditation or periodic (cyclical) evaluation, ARACIS uses criteria, standards and performance indicators fit-for-purpose for study programs, according to the Bologna cycles: 1st cycle (“licență”, equivalent to the Bachelor’s degree), 2nd cycle (Master degree). While the general concepts of quality domains and standards are basically the same, as specified by the Law, their corresponding performance indicators can be different and specific according to the type of degree obtained after graduation (1st cycle, 2nd cycle).

ARACIS does not evaluate as yet the 3rd cycle (Doctoral degree) since the legislation is still under revision; the legislation presently in force requires a different, additional fit-for-purpose special procedure and it is not clear how such activity, involving ARACIS and other bodies of the MoNE are supposed to cooperate and how the costs of the common evaluation would be covered. Currently, the deadline for completing the evaluation of the 3rd cycle has been delayed, by Emergency Ordinance of the Government, to the end of 2019.

In terms of the scope/nature/aim of the external evaluation process there is a distinction between *periodic/cyclical quality assurance evaluation of (already) accredited study programs or HE institutions* and *external evaluation for accreditation*. While both evaluations are contributing to quality enhancement, the *periodic external evaluation* and the *external evaluation aiming to accreditation* have their own specificities.

The “Methodology for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference, and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education” to be referred further on as the **Methodology** (Annex 2.1), and other Government Decisions which amend the **Methodology** or Ministerial Orders issued by the MoNE, which contribute to quality enhancement in HE institutions, as well as sub-subsequent procedures/documents approved by ARACIS Council, such as ARACIS Guide, with 6 parts, other procedures – operational, internal quality assurance etc. are publicly available documents and can be found on the ARACIS webpage¹⁵ (see Annex 2.1 and Annex 2.2).

The governing body of ARACIS – the Council - is presented in this Section, paragraph 9.5 - compliance with ESG 3.5 – Resources, at the paragraph describing Human resource. The same paragraph provides information on other human resource: external evaluators, representatives of stakeholders – students, who are also partners in HE, representatives of employers.

Stakeholders are involved in the work of the agency. They have an important role in the process of setting the procedures, by direct participation, at several occasions, in the activity of the Council and Executive Board. Students are actively involved in the activity of the Permanent Specialty Commissions. They are selected and appointed according to a procedure¹⁶ approved by the ARACIS Council (see overview in English in Annex 7.2).

One representative of the national confederation of employers is member of the Council.

The interaction with the representatives of the HE institutions is permanent, via the National Rectors’ Conference. According to its own mission, the Romanian National Council of Rectors (CNR) represents accredited universities in Romania, in relation to state authorities, being the only body/institution to promote collectively the interests of universities in relation to these authorities, including the legislative process that affects education and research. ARACIS is invited at the sessions of the National Council of Rectors and participates with presentations at these meetings. For example, at the last two sessions of CNR that took place in October and November 2017, the representatives of ARACIS held presentations on the following topics: “Diagnosis of the fields of study for the Master degrees and of Master programs”, “Statistical substantiation of doctoral studies/ Evaluation of doctoral schools”, “Evaluation of doctoral studies. Formal and content related aspects regarding the evaluation process”

¹⁵ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/procedures/>

¹⁶ Selection procedure of students in Permanent Specialty Commissions (in Romanian):
http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Posturi_vacante/2017/Procedura_selectie_studenti_comisii_de_specialitate.doc



(in Romanian). Usually, ARACIS presentations (in Romanian) held at CNR meetings are published on ARACIS website¹⁷.

The processes and criteria of the external evaluation **activity 4 (occasional)** of the agency, as per Table 5.1, are described at Section 6 as well as at section 10.5. Details on the process can be found also in Annex 8.

The processes and criteria of the external evaluation **activity 5 (occasional)** of the agency, as per Table 5.1, are described at Section 6 as well as at section 10.5, as applied for evaluating law study programs in the Republic of Moldova. The sequencing of the activity is generally similar to the description in Table 5.1.

Progress: The agency has opened itself to a larger participation of employers. The activity of Commission of employers, which was difficult to organize due to difficulty to have cvora, has been assigned to employers registered in the ARACIS National Register of Employers¹⁸.

The Web page of the agency includes information of ARACIS activity, which became more easily accessed. Explanatory texts are posted to facilitate access at information of general public, including the web page in English.

9.2 ESG Standard 3.2 Official status

ARACIS compliance

ARACIS was given official status by Law. Initially, ARACIS was established as a quality assurance agency by Emergency Government Ordinance no. 75/2005, approved by the Romanian Parliament by Law. No 87/2006, with subsequent amendments and modifications (see Annex 1.1). ARACIS is thus an autonomous, officially (legally) entrusted Agency which provides services related to HE quality assurance and accreditation. ARACIS judgments and decisions are widely accepted by the HE providers and the MoNE. Based on ARACIS advisory decisions, the MoNE initiates Government Decisions on the structure of the national HE system and master studies. For instance, for the academic year 2016-2017 one can find information of the website of the MoNE for 1st cycle “licenta”¹⁹ and for 2nd cycle “masterat”²⁰.

In case ARACIS, after external evaluations, identify low quality of SPs or of HEIs, its judgments may serve as a basis for administrative measures taken by the MoNE, for which there is constant consultation with the agency.

9.3 ESG Standard 3.3 Independence

ARACIS compliance

In view of Art. 16 (1) of the Law, (Annex 1.1), “ARACIS is an autonomous public institution, of national interest, having a legal status (“personalitate juridică”) and its own budget of revenue and expenses”.

The Law is stating that the ARACIS headquarters, organizational structures and internal rules of functioning are adopted by decision of ARACIS Council. Therefore, neither the Ministry of National Education nor other third parties, such as universities, other stakeholders etc. have no institutional influence on ARACIS organization, staffing, premises etc. Following approval of the ARACIS **Methodology** by Government Decision, the external evaluation of the quality of education of HE providers is carried out independently by the agency. Furthermore, the Ministry delivers the official forms of the diplomas to be filled in by higher education institutions and awarded to their graduates only for institutions and study programs having fulfilled all the legal requirements regarding QA

¹⁷ <http://www.aracis.ro/publicatii/publicatii-aracis/>

¹⁸ National Register of Employers: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Registru_Evaluatori/Registru_angajatorilor.xlsx

¹⁹ <https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere%20articole/HG%20615-2017.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere%20articole/HG%20614-2017.pdf>



and accreditation. If a HEI or study program is not authorized but however delivers diplomas, these are not legally recognized and the persons and institutions having acted in this sense are held responsible according to the Law. ARACIS nominates and appoints independently from third parties its external experts (see also Section 9.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources – Human resources). All experts sign a commitment to avoid conflicts of interests, according to the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct (see Annex 4.1).

9.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis

ARACIS Compliance

In order to evaluate the quality of ARACIS activities in the external evaluation process and its impact on the academic environment, the Agency carried out, between 2014 and 2017, two relevant research activities at the level of higher education system, finalized by a new Quality Barometer (2015), as a continuation of previous Quality Barometers published in 2009 and 2010.

In Annex 6. – Thematic analyzes, the results of both studies on quality evaluation of ARACIS activities and its impact on the academic environment, are presented synthetically – 6.1 Perception of the policies and quality of Romanian higher education at the system level; 6.2 Opinion of the higher education institutions on the quality of ARACIS activities carried out in the external evaluation process.

Between December 2014 and October 2015, a first Thematic analysis was run, as a sociological research (quantitative and qualitative) on measuring respondents' perception of the policies and quality of Romanian higher education at the system level (*respondents: 1.533 students, 1.454 teachers and 1.572 employers*). The study was published in *Quality Barometer* and higher education institutions received one printed copy (Annex 6.1).

Between January and April 2017, a second thematic analysis took place, as a survey of the opinions of university management and evaluators from ARACIS National Register. The survey aimed at: a. studying *the opinion of the higher education institutions* on the quality of ARACIS activities carried out in the external evaluation process (*626 respondents from the university management*); b. studying *the opinion of the evaluators from ARACIS National Register* on the Agency role in the development of the higher education system in the following period (*328 respondents from ARACIS evaluators - teachers and students*) (Annex 6.2). The results of this analysis were also disseminated at EQAF (Riga, November, 2017).²¹

For a more detailed analysis, the materials are published in full text on the Agency website, in English and Romanian.

Progress: recommendations of the ENQA co-ordinated review in 2013 to continue research on ARACIS own activity results were followed. Increased visibility of stakeholders perception of ARACIS

9.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

ARACIS compliance

Human resource

ARACIS operates with human resource, which can be included in five categories; the activity is performed on the basis of the principles established in the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct (see Annex 4.1).

i) Council members

²¹ http://eua.be/Libraries/EQAF-2017/eqaf-2017_breakout-sessions_25nov.pdf?sfvrsn=0



The ARACIS Council is the leading body of the agency. After the previous ENQA coordinated review of the agency, in 2013, the **Law** has been further modified in the sense that the Agency is now empowered to better match its number of staff positions to its evolving working load. In accordance to the legislation, at present, the ARACIS Council has 21 members, as follows: 17 academics, representing different study domains; two students representatives of the Romanian Students Federations (Unions), reconfirmed yearly at the beginning of each academic year; one representative of the employers' federations, one representative of the trade-union with the highest number of members in higher education. According to the Law, the composition of the Council should be renewed periodically. The selection procedure was organized in the period February – March 2017 for filling in 11 positions of academics, whose four years mandates were completed (see Procedure²² - in Romanian; English translation is available on request). The Ministerial Order no. 5751/2015 approving the selection procedure, which is a competition-based process, was published in the Official Gazette nr. 85/12.11.2015. External dimension of the selection is participation of representatives of ENQA and ESU. The representatives of student federations are being nominated independently by the student's federations each year, in October, after the beginning of a new academic year. For 2017, re-nomination/appointment of the two student representatives took place in October. The procedure for nomination/appointment of the representative of the employers Confederations started in 2016 and was completed in 2017 to fill in the vacant seat.

Progress: after the two student representatives were included in April 2011 as full members of the Council, the Law was amended at the request of ARACIS to include the representatives of the employers' confederations and of the trade-unions in education as members of the Council.

ii) **External evaluators** (academic staff, international evaluators, employers) who voluntarily apply for registration in the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators – NRE (“Registrul National al Evaluatorilor – RNE”) The register can be accessed at the following links: for Romanian academics - http://pfe.aracis.ro/inscriere/registru/lista_comisii/; from the academics listed in the RNE, the Council nominates the members of the 13 Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions according to the procedure²³ described in Annex 7.1.

For international/foreign evaluators, the Register can be accessed on the agency website <http://www.aracis.ro/en/organisation/national-register-of-evaluators/>, direct link: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Registru_Evaluatori/ARACIS_Register_of_International_Evaluators.xls.

For evaluators representing the employers, the Register can be accessed on the agency website <http://www.aracis.ro/en/organisation/national-register-of-evaluators/>, direct link: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Registru_Evaluatori/Registru_angajatorilor.xlsx

The Employers' Register was set up in December 2015, as a result of the replacement of the Employers' Commission in place at that time (according to the decision of the ARACIS Council taken in the meeting from 17.12.2015). The change of the structure was imposed by the new approach of the agency regarding the role of the employers' representatives in the evaluation processes, as it came out from the EUR-ACE Methodology.

Selection of evaluators, members of the Employers' Register, started with the engineering study domain. The selection of the evaluators – representatives of employers was conducted as per the following steps:

- Proposals were received from reputed Romanian universities that offer engineering programs to contact their partners from the economic/ industrial sector (interested in the engineering higher education);

²² Procedure of selecting, through public competition, of the ARACIS Council members (in Romanian): http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Posturi_vacante/2017/Consiliu/Procedura_de_selectare_prin_concurs.pdf

²³ Procedure for nomination of the members of the Permanent Specialty Commissions (in Romanian): http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Posturi_vacante/2017/Comisii_permanente/Procedura_de_selectare_si_numire_a_noulor_membrii_ai_Comisiilor_de_experti_permanenti.pdf



- The selection was based on individual evaluations of the applications, which consisted in: letter of motivation, CV and letter of recommendation from the company manager;
- The results of the selection process were approved by the ARACIS Council.

Following this procedure, new evaluators, coming from the professional field of engineering and representing companies with national and international recognition in their fields of activity, were added to the Register (http://pfe.aracis.ro/inscriere/registru/lista_c/15/). Periodic training of evaluators is organized by ARACIS. The most recent training of employers was organized in November 2016 (Braşov, 11.11.2016). Most recent trainings with regard to EUR-ACE Standards and Methodology were organized in 2017 (Braşov, 23 - 24.02.2017 and Sibiu, 16 - 17.03.2017).

The role of the evaluators and that of the Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions was described in another part of this self-assessment report (see Section 10.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes).

To help the agency and the evaluators, an electronic on-line facility has been developed and implemented. This facility allows the agency to test the level of understanding of the QA procedures of the agency, for all the Romanian academics who apply to become external evaluators. Successful applicants become eligible to be included in the RNE and to take part in evaluation of study programs and higher education institutions. Thus, the evaluators listed in the RNE undergo a thorough selection, which takes place in electronic form as an online evaluation process. This testing is also a learning exercise for the candidates but also for already accepted evaluators in the Register. The number of evaluators in the register is now of 1333 (see <http://pfe.aracis.ro/cms/>). The on-line procedure is under revision to include modifications of the **Methodology** and Guide.

The composition of the Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions is periodically revised after an analysis of the quality of their work and interaction with the universities.

iii) Students evaluators, representing the main Students' Federations (Unions) active in Romania with a legal status, namely National Alliance of Student Organizations of Romania (ANOSR), National Union of Students of Romania (UNSR), Union of Students of Romania (USR)

The modification by the Law of the ARACIS Council composition, to include student representation, recognizes the importance of the students as major stakeholders within the higher education system. In accordance with ESG, students actively participate to Council debates and to the decision-making process. Students participate as full members of the Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions of the agency and are involved as panel members in the evaluation of study programs and higher education institutions. Students are registered in the National Register of Evaluators - Students²⁴.

iv) Professional staff, working directly for QA activity – with Permanent Specialty Commissions, site visits etc., for the *Accreditation Department* and *External Evaluation of Quality Department* of the ARACIS Council. Their responsibilities are multiple: to receive and technically process and manage applications from higher education institutions for external evaluation, distribute them to the panels of evaluators, assisting evaluation panels in their activity, assuring proper and follow-up of documents, assisting in writing reports and analyses, assisting visiting panels in missions of evaluation of higher education institutions.

The number of professional staff remained approximately constant over the years: three persons left the agency between 2014 and 2017, due to various reasons, but three new staff members were hired to fill the vacant positions in 2017, before the Government decided again not to allow public institutions to hire new staff in 2017. Presently, the total number of permanent professional staff is nine.

²⁴ http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Registru_Evaluatori/Total_RNE_S_febr_2017.xls



v) **Administrative staff and financial staff**; the Economic director is responsible for financial matters; the activity of the other administrative staff is as per the structure presented in Figure 1. The total number of hired administrative and financial staff is 24.

At present, the number and quality of professional, administrative and financial staff is considered adequate to enable the Agency to organize and operate its external quality assurance processes in an active and efficient manner, based on the current scale of activities. In the perspective of accreditation of Doctoral schools (see also Section 14 of the SAR) it is possible that additional staff would be needed.

ARACIS has created in 2013 the Direction of International relations, projects and cooperation. Together with the other internal structures of the agency, the Direction organizes and supports international activities of the agency and contributes to the management of EU funded projects. In 2014 and 2016 two new persons were hired to perform activity at this Direction.

Financial resources

With regard to the **financial resources**, ARACIS is self-funded (see Art. 16 (1) of the Law – Annex 1.1) and has the following sources of income:

- **Fee income** from higher education institutions and other higher education providers, which cover the costs of the external evaluations. The amount of fees²⁵ for each evaluation activity is specified by Government Decision²⁶, according to specific criteria, such as study program level, student numbers of the institution etc.;
- **Contracts** with the Ministry of National Education, when at the request of MoNE, for instance in view of undertaking of specific activities, such as external evaluations of quality assurance at institutional level, contribution to follow-up activities of the MoNE etc.;
- **Funds attracted following successful participation in public competitions** (tenders) for EU structural non-refundable funds for priority areas of interest regarding quality assurance in higher education. This possibility allowed ARACIS to apply for several projects. Two projects were financed and implemented by ARACIS as beneficiary (“QUALITAS” and “ACADINOV”). In several other projects, completed in the abovementioned period, ARACIS acted as partner (“IMPALA”, “AQUA TS”). Three newly signed projects (QAFIN, DEQAR, TARGET) continue this activity (see Section 14).

In 2015 the financial activity of ARACIS has been verified by the Court of Accounts which presented its Report on 18 December 2015 and its Decision on 13.01.2016. Following this report, a number of organizational measures were taken, including proposals for legislative modifications to allow increase of the low salaries of many staff members. This was identified also by the Court of accounts as serious drawback in promoting and hiring quality motivated staff.

Between 2013 and 2017 the overview of income and expenditure expressed in Romanian lei (Note: in November 2017 the official exchange rate of the National Bank of Romania was 1 EUR = 4.64 Lei) is presented in the Table 9.1 below.

²⁵ [http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie - Proceduri/tarife_ARACIS.pdf](http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/tarife_ARACIS.pdf)

²⁶ Government Decision no. 1731/2006 on tariffs/fees for the conduct of reviews, approving the higher education institutions' study programmes authorization and accreditation fees, and the fees for external evaluation of quality in education of ARACIS

Table 9.1

No.	Explanation	Year				
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017-30 VI
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Income, of which:	19.017.677	17.310.783	11.215.201	12.761.901	7.573.235
	- from EU non-refundable funding (EU projects)	3.943.245	114.283	1.564.157	2.032.793	53.617
2	- expenses	12.549.027	7.503.621	11.048.782	6.960.263	4.355.918
	- from EU non-refundable funding (EU projects)	2.474.792	81.315	69.963	3.893	
3=1-2	Surplus or Loss	6.468.650	9.807.162	166.419	5.801.638	3.217.317
	- from EU non-refundable funding (EU projects)	1.468.453	32.968	1.494.194	2.028.900	53.617

At 30 June 2017 (end of first semester of the fiscal year 2017) the total available funds of the agency were 53.886.762 lei.

The analysis of the evolution of ARACIS financial resources indicates a positive trend. In 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 the total income included additional funding from EU projects, identified separately in Table 9.1. Expenses were lower than predicted, mainly due to the following circumstances: low wages of technical staff, as a consequence of legal restrictions on salary levels, which could not be raised from 2009 until 2015 (15% raise); the number of permanent staff remained approximately constant (30-35 persons) because hiring new staff was prohibited to public institutions, including self-funded ones (from own revenues – the case of ARACIS); lower expenses with space rental at the old address; interdiction by law to public institutions to purchase furniture and other goods, until 2016.

Despite of these somewhat difficult circumstances, funding of the agency provide sufficient resources for the development of the quality assurance processes and procedures as well as for participation in the activities of ENQA, EQAR, CEENQA, INQAAHE etc. such as projects, working groups, quality assurance Fora etc. in the period of the analysis and in the future.

Premises

In terms of **premises** ARACIS has used between 2005 and December 2016 the office rooms rented from the University of Bucharest, as the different attempts to acquire its own building failed, due to the scarce and expensive offer of adequate office spaces. In 2016 the agency organized, according to the Romanian legislation, another public tender, for renting another space since works on the building of the University of Bucharest were necessary – the building must be structurally strengthened due to high seismic risk. After the completion of the tender procedures, in December 2016 the agency moved in a new facility, with more generous space. The stakeholders and partners of the agency were announced in due time about the new address.

Progress: ARACIS has moved in a new location, at the premises of the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest (hired space, to provide better space for activity). New technical equipment and furniture was bought.

Website

The **website** of the Agency was reorganized and has become more friendly and effective, contributing to improved visibility of the activity of ARACIS. The new English version includes also the procedures for international evaluators to become listed in the Register of external evaluators and on the site one can find accurate data on the current activities, as well as information on organization, procedures, results of evaluation, legislative framework, international activities, publications, projects etc. Work is still in progress with financial support from the project QAFIN (see also Sections 13 and 14).



To re-construct the website, the agency shall meet also its obligations to comply with the EU standards:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016L2102&from=EN>;

standard: <http://mandate376.standards.eu/standard> (Clause 9, 10, 11 for website).

9.6 ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

ARACIS Compliance

ARACIS has been constantly working to improve its own internal QA process and procedures, as a condition of maintaining and upgrading a sound internal quality culture. In this sense a new compartment was created, to deal with improving IQA procedures, for which a person was hired to fill in a vacant position in 2017.

Process and procedures

Processes and procedures have proved to be in compliance with the ESG 2015, as it is shown in more detail in this report (see Section 10.2 ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose).

As a permanent result of the EU funded project “ACADEMIS”, for which funding ended in 2011, the procedure of external evaluation of HE institutions has been improved. An important change was the provision that one of professional staff takes part in the site visit missions at institutional level, as secretary of the mission, to assist external evaluators with technical matters, alleviate paper work etc. This provision is now applied on a permanent basis.

Staff and current activity

The quality of the activity of staff is monitored and analysed, following also the procedures which are stipulated in the Romanian legislation. According to the results of the analyses, identification of critical situations leads to correction measures and preventing measures. These may refer to: deficiencies in running the processes (evaluations, management); using inadequate forms for evaluation; flaws in applying the provisions of methodologies/guides. These are communicated to the management of the agency (Executive Board) using documents: Internal Audit Reports; Reports of external evaluators (i.e. Court of Accounts); appeals or complaints of HEIs; negative feed-back in the Evaluation forms (“questionnaires”) from training sessions. Examples of correction measures taken are aiming at improving communication between the internal structures of the agency, introduction of formalized procedures for internal quality assurance. Examples of prevention measures are improving methodologies, improving of processes, staff training. An important result of a long-term planning is the change of location of the agency in December 2016, which offers now better working conditions and space for the activity of the permanent staff, commissions and the Council. The relocation of the archive from the agency premises to a hired specialised facility, together with a procedure for quick access to documents, contributed also to better use of space. This is a noticeable progress since the ARACIS “historical” archive contains a large number of documents referring to all external evaluations performed by CNEEAA (1994-2005) and ARACIS (2007 – present).

Prevention measures are mainly focused on staff development. The ARACIS Council sets-up professional staff development activities, including those which were organized using the resources of the projects implemented over the 2013 to the present period. An overview of training sessions organized and run by ARACIS for its own staff is presented in Annex 7.6.

Several members of the staff participated in actions, such as seminars, workshops etc. supported by the agency in several ENQA partner agencies, i.e. under the framework of projects such as IMPALA, participation at European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) etc. The compartment of Internal Quality Assurance was staffed with one qualified person, who is in charge with evidence of all documents and procedures which are obligatory for

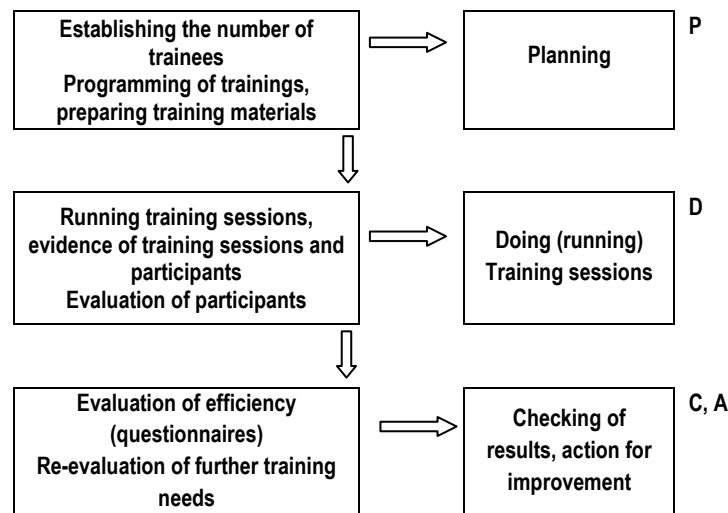


public institutions, as per Romanian legislation. The IQA procedures were revised under the supervision of a Monitoring Commission, under the authority of the ARACIS President. The work is in progress on a permanent basis to extend the IQA procedures to match new activities of the agency and to improve enhancement of the current ones.

Trainings of evaluators

Training sessions are organised as per the P-D-C-A (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle, which is illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9



Several training sessions were organized over the past four years, for over 600 persons, as per Annex 7.7, for academics and students.

Other dedicated training sessions were organized for students only, gathering an average number of 180 students, out of which around 75 already participated in the external evaluation panels at institutional level. Training student evaluators is a permanent task for ARACIS and the students' organizations due to the fact that a significant number of trained students graduate each year and leave the educational system. The training sessions, which are organized periodically under organizational responsibility of student federations, are supported by ARACIS with lectures, practical activity and partial covering of expenses. Projects funded from EU programs allowed ARACIS to fully cover costs of trainings organized in 2015.

Ethics and Professional conduct

The Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct was recently updated, modified to include new and clearer provisions (see Annex 4.1).

The contracts with the evaluators contain explicit reference to their terms of reference and obligations and conduct (see example in Annex 4.2).

Progress: The IQA policy of ARACIS was revised and is subject to permanent development. The Monitoring Commission has an approved plan for developing and implementing IQA mechanism on an improved formalized basis. The Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct has been improved.



9.7 ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

ARACIS Compliance

ARACIS complies with the provisions of the standard. According to the Law (Art. 22): “ARACIS should apply for registration in EQAR”; “ARACIS should follow the procedures of cyclical international accreditation - Art 22 (2)”.

Consequently, ARACIS was externally reviewed in 2008 and 2013. Both reviews were coordinated by ENQA. ARACIS was granted ENQA full membership in 2009. ENQA full membership was reconfirmed in 2013 for a five years period. ENQA decision for reconfirmation of ARACIS full membership is dated 28.10.2013, until 28 October 2018.

The follow-up Report was sent to ENQA on 30 September 2015. Clarifications were requested by ENQA Board on 20 November 2015. ARACIS’ answer to clarifications request was sent to ENQA on 27 January 2016. ENQA decision for reconfirmation of ARACIS full membership is dated 28.10.2013. Based on the outcomes of the ENQA – coordinated reviews and on its own evaluations EQAR has approved inclusion of ARACIS in the Register (EQAR) in 2009. ARACIS applied for renewal of the Inclusion in the Register on 29.11.2013. Based on the external review report and following its own analysis, the Register Committee of EQAR has decided to renew the inclusion of ARACIS on the Register for a five years period from the date of the external review report, until 30.09.2018. The Approval of ARACIS Application by EQAR Register Committee is dated 22.05.2014.

ARACIS follow-up of Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and agency’s resulting follow-up (for second review only) are addressed in section 12 of this SAR.

10. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 2)

The ARACIS Methodology and Guide comply with ESG 2015, as per Comparison below, starting with **core activities 1, 2, 3 as per Table 5.1 in the SAR.**

Reference to **Activity 4, as per Table 5.1 in the SAR** is presented at the end of Section 10.

Reference to **Activity 5, as per Table 5.1 in the SAR** is presented in the Section 10.5.

10.1 - Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

ARACIS Compliance

The internal quality assurance is approached in:

1. Methodology (Annex 2.1) **Part II. Criteria, Standards, and Performance Indicators for Quality Assurance and Accreditation**, section 2.2 *Areas, Criteria, Standards, Performance Indicators*: “Area (Quality domain) A: Institutional Capacity. Criterion A.1– Institutional, Administrative and Managerial Structures. *Standard S.A.1.1 Mission, objectives and academic integrity*: “The higher education institution formulates its own mission and establishes the objectives to be achieved in accordance with a set of levels of reference. The institution proves that it respects and defends the staff and students’ academic freedom and functions in terms of university autonomy and public responsibility and accountability for the education it offers and the resources it uses to meet these objectives.” (page 20) as well as in the content of Performance Indicator **IP.A.1.1.3. Responsibility and public accountability**: “Min: The institution has internal auditing practices concerning the main fields of academic activity in order to ensure that its stated commitments are rigorously observed while at the same time ensuring public transparency. Ref. 1: Internal auditing is taking place effectively at institutional and departmental level, and on a periodic basis, observing internal regulations, financial and accounting procedures, academic integrity, teaching and learning methodology, examination, and research fields. An academic auditing report is discussed annually in the Senate and published, and an improvement plan is elaborated.” (page 21).



2. Methodology Part III: External Quality Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions, section 1.2 *Fundamental principles of addressing the quality of education*: “According to the legislation in force, the achievement and evaluation of quality have both an external and **internal dimension**. The **internal dimension** of academic quality builds upon the legislation in force, the specificity of each higher education institution, and the tradition and cultural patrimony of our higher education system. **It falls entirely under the responsibility of each higher education institution or provider of higher education programs**”(page 7). From this perspective, quality assurance becomes a process adapted to the existing institutional specificity and a mechanism for permanently improving academic performance or results” (page 7). „**Institutional responsibility: the quality assurance management and responsibility fall under the competence of each accredited higher education institution, in conformity with academic autonomy**” (page 8) (**institutions’ responsibility for the quality of their programs**); section 3.2. *External evaluation standards* “a) **The use of the internal quality assurance procedures**. An external evaluation of quality is preceded by a self-evaluation report and **is based on the institutional accomplishment** of the criteria, standards, and performance indicators specific to the internal quality assurance, as presented in the Methodology” (page 47).

3. Methodology Part III: External Quality Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions: „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.” (page 44) (**link between internal and external quality assurance**) **ESG Standard 1.1**

A general mapping table for comparison between ESG Part 1 and the ARACIS criteria, standards and performance indicators for external evaluation is presented in Table 10.1. Detailed reference to Comparison between ESG 1 and ARACIS procedures follows after Table 10.1, for all five activities as per Table 5.1.

Table 10.1

ESG	Activities as per Table 5.1 in SAR				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Provisional authorizing to operate	Accreditation	Periodic (cyclical) evaluation	EUR-ACE Label Awarding	International/cross-border evaluation
	1.1 Study programs (SPs) Bachelor/“Licență”; Master) 1.2 HE institutions	2.1 Study programs (Bachelor/“Licență”; Master) 2.2 HE institutions 2.3 Master studies domains	3.1 Study programs (Bachelor/“Licență”; Master) 3.2 HE institutions 3.3 Master studies domains	4. Evaluation of Engineering Study Programs	5. Evaluation of 17 Study Programs in R. of Moldova
	ARACIS criteria, standards and performance indicators				
	Methodology – Annex 2.1			Annex 8, complementary to Methodology of Annex 2.1 (columns 1,2,3 in Table)	Contract with the Ministry of Education of R.of Moldova (see Generalized Report²⁷)
1.1 Policy for QA	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C / C.1/ S.C.1.1/ PI.C.1.1.1, PI.C.1.1.2; C.8/ S.C.8.1; A/ A.1/ S.A.1.2/ PI.A.1.2.2, PI.A.1.2.3; B/ B.4/ S.B.4.1/ PI.B.4.1.1, PI.B.4.1.2, PI.B.4.1.3.			Items: 5.1; 5.2	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table

²⁷ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/international-activities/international-evaluations/>



1.2 Design and approval of programs	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): B/ B.1/ S.B.1.2; C/ C.2/ S.C.2.1/ PI.C.2.1.1.	Items: 1.1; 1.2;1.3;2.1;2.3; 3.4	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): B/ B.2/ S.B. 2.1/ PI.B.2.1.1, PI.B.2.1.2, PI.B.2.1.4, PI.B.2.1.5.	Items:2.1;2.2;2.4	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.4 Student admission, recognition and certification	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): B/ B.1/ S.B.1.2/ PI.B.1.2.1, PI.B.1.2.2, PI.B.1.2.3; S.B.1.1/ PI.B.1.1.1, PI.B.1.1.2; B.2/ S.B.2.1 C/ C.2/ S.C.2.1/ PI.C.2.1.1, PI.C.2.1.2; C.3/ S.C.3.1/ PI.C.3.1.1, PI.C.3.1.2.	Items: 4.1;4.2;4.3;4.4	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.5 Teaching staff	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C/ C.4/ S.C.4.1/ PI.C.4.1.1, PI.C.4.1.2, PI.C.4.1.3, PI.C.4.1.4.	Items: 3.1;	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.6 Learning resources and student support	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): A/ A.2/ S.A.2.1/ PI.A.2.1.1, PI.A.2.1.2, PI.A.2.1.3, PI.A.2.1.4; C/ C.5/ S.C.5.1/ PI.C.5.1.1, PI.C.5.1.2, PI.C.5.1.3, PI.C.5.1.4.	Items: 3.2	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.7 Information management	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C/ C.6/ S.C.6.1/ PI.C.3.6.1.	Items: 5.4;5.5	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.8 Public information	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C/ C.7/ S.C.7.1/ PI.C.3.7.1.	Items: 5.6	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C/ C.2/ S.C.2.1/ PI.C.2.1.1, PI.C.2.1.2.	Items: 5.3	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	In Romania external evaluation is regulated by law. Romanian Higher education institutions and their programs undergo mandatory external quality assurance every five years	External quality assurance - every five years (ENAAE regulations consistent with Romanian law)	Institutions fulfill the obligations of their national regulations

Comparison between ESG Part 1 and ARACIS procedures

ESG 1.1 Policy for quality assurance. The ARACIS Methodology addresses this standard at:

Domain (Area) C. Quality Management.

Criterion C.1 – Quality Assurance Strategies and Procedures

Standard *S.C.1.1. Quality Assurance Structures and Policies.* Structures, policies, and strategies create the institutional framework for developing and concretely monitoring quality, for establishing a quality culture and continually enhancing quality standards; *Performance Indicators (PI): PI C.1.1.1. Organization of the Quality Assurance System; PI C.1.1.2 Quality Assurance Policies and Strategies;*

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



Standard S.C.8.1 *The institutional structure for quality education assurance corresponds to the legal provisions and acts on a permanent basis (existence of a policy of internal quality assurance, internal mechanisms, public policy, involving of internal actors)*

Domain (Area) A. Institutional Capacity

Criterion A.1 – Institutional, Administrative and Managerial Structures

Standard S.A.1.2 *Management and administration. Performance Indicators (PI): PI.A.1.2.2. Strategic Management; PI.A.1.2.3 Effective administration.*

The **Methodology** indicates at Section 1.5 *Quality Management* those strategies, structures, techniques and operations through which the institution demonstrates that it evaluates its own performance related to education quality assurance and improvement, and has information systems in place which demonstrate its learning and research outcomes. The importance of this area consists, both on the emphasis put on the quality assurance approach of the institution towards all its activities, and on the presentation of information and data to the public, proving a certain quality level.

Domain (area) B. Educational Effectiveness

Criterion B.4 – Financial management of the organization.

Standard S.B.4.1 *Budgeting and accounting. Performance Indicators (PI): PI.B.4.1.1 Income and expense budget; PI.B.4.1.2 Accounting; PI.B.4.1.3 Auditing and public accountability.*

ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programs. The ARACIS Methodology addresses this standard at:

Domain (Area) B. Educational Effectiveness

Criterion B.1 – Content of study programs

Standard S.B.1.2 *Structure and range of study programs;*

Domain (Area) C. Quality Management

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

Standard S.C.2.1 *Approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programs and their corresponding qualifications.*

Performance Indicators (PI): PI C.2.1.1 Existence and implementation of regulations regarding the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programs

ESG 1.3 Student centred learning, teaching and assessment.

The ARACIS Methodology addresses this standard at:

Domain (Area) B. Educational Effectiveness

Criterion B.2 – Learning outcomes

Standard S.B.2.1 *Validation of academic qualifications. Performance Indicators (PI): PI.B.2.1.1 Validation by employability within the field of the academic qualification; PI.B.2.1.2 Validation by access to the next level of academic studies; PI B.2.1.4 Focus on student-centred learning methods; PI B.2.1.5 Student career guidance*



ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification. The ARACIS Methodology addresses this standard at:

Domain (Area) B. Educational Effectiveness

Criterion B.1 – Content of study programs

Standard *S.B.1.2 Structure and range of study programs. Performance Indicators (PI):* PI.B.1.2.1. Structure of study programs; PI.B.1.2.2. Differentiation in the implementation of study programs; PI.B.1.2.3. Relevance of study programs (progression, recognition)

Standard *S.B.1.1. Student admission. Performance Indicators (PI):*PI.B.1.1.1 Principles of recruitment and admission's policy; PI.B.1.1.2 Admission practices (admission)

Criterion B.2 – Learning outcomes

Standard *S.B.2.1 Validation of academic qualifications*

Domain (Area) C. Quality Management

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

Standard *S.C.2.1 Approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of the study programs and diplomas corresponding to the level of qualifications. Performance Indicators (PI):* PI.C.2.1.1 Existence and implementation of regulations regarding the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programs; PI.C.2.1.2 Correlations between diplomas and qualifications

Criterion C.3 – Objective and transparent procedures for learning outcomes evaluation.

Standard *S.C.3.1. Student evaluation. Performance Indicators (PI):*PI.C.3.1.1 The higher education institution has regulations for students' examination and grading which are rigorously and consistently applied; PI.C.3.1.2 Integration of examinations in the teaching and learning plan, by courses and study programs

ESG 1.5 Teaching staff. The ARACIS Methodology addresses this standard at:

Domain (Area) C. Quality Management

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

Standard *S.C.4.1 The quality of the teaching and research staff. Performance Indicators (PI):*PI.C.4.1.1 Ratio of teaching staff to students; PI.C.4.1.2 Peer review; PI.C.4.1.3 Student evaluation of the teaching staff; PI.C.4.1.4 University management's evaluation of the teaching staff

ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support. The ARACIS Methodology addresses this standard at:

Domain (Area) A. Institutional Capacity

Criterion A.2 – Material resources

Standard *S.A.2.1 Property, equipment, and allocated financial resources. Performance Indicators (PI):*PI.A.2.1.1 Facilities for teaching, research and other activities; PI.A.2.1.2 Equipment; PI.A.2.1.3 Financial resources; PI.A.2.1.4 System of scholarships allocation and other forms of financial aid for students

Domain (Area) C. Quality Management

Criterion C.5 – Access to adequate learning resources



Standard S.C.5.1 *Learning resources and student services. Performance Indicators (PI):* 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

ESG 1.7 Information management. The ARACIS Methodology addresses this standard at:

Domain (Area) C. Quality Management

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

Standard S.C.6.1 *Information systems. Performance Indicators (PI):* PI.3.6.1 Databases

ESG 1.8 Public information. The ARACIS Methodology addresses this standard at:

Domain (Area) C. Quality Management

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

Standard S.C.7.1 *Public information. Performance Indicators (PI)* PI.3.7.1 The provision of public information

ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and review of programs. The ARACIS Methodology addresses this standard at:

Domain (Area) C. Quality Management

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

Standard C.2.1 *Approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of the study programs and diplomas corresponding to the level of qualifications. Performance Indicators (PI):* PI.C.2.1.1 Existence and implementation of regulations regarding the initiation, approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programs; PI.C.2.1.2 Correlations between diplomas and qualifications

ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Cyclical (periodic) external quality assurance is performed for HEI and their programs according to the Law. The period between two successive evaluations is five years.

The ARACIS Methodology indicates that Domains, criteria, standards and performance indicators used for accreditation are the same for periodic evaluations, with differences related to follow-up and benchmarking of performance indicators.

10.2 ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

ARACIS Compliance

According to the **Methodology Part IV. Applications Differentiated by Study Cycles**, section 4.1.2. *Objectives of provisional authorisation and accreditation*, the Objectives of external QA are the following: "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, the support of the process of the elimination of education quality dysfunctions and deficiencies; support to the permanent improvement of quality of education



through dissemination of good practices and encouragement of experience exchange between universities which offer similar study programs”; „The **specific objectives** of provisional authorizing and accreditation are the following: a) to ensure the academic communities, beneficiaries and the public in general, that the education provider, authorized or accredited to organize a study program, demonstrates that it meets the minimum quality standards of a higher education institution; b) to promote the engagement of the education providing organization in the direction of the continuous growth of academic quality, proved through learning and research results; **(external quality assurance to have clear aims agreed by stakeholders)** c) to support higher education institutions to develop a quality management and culture and to demonstrate, through relevant evidences and documents, their state of play; **(allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement)** d) to determine the education provider to cooperate with other higher education institutions in the achievement, monitoring and comparison of academic quality **(take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality)** ; f) to identify and make public any attempt to offer a program which does not correspond to the minimum standards of academic quality”.

The workload which education providers should undertake to meet the requirements of external QA processes is specified in the ARACIS Guide²⁸ (six parts), where the content of the Self Evaluation Report of the institution and the entire external evaluation procedure are described in detail **(level of workload on institutions)**.

The cost of external evaluation²⁹ is public, as it is specified in the Government Decision nr. 1731/2006³⁰, and has not been changed, to ensure HEIs on predictability and to allow planning of costs for authorizing/accreditation/periodic (five years) external evaluations of study programs and respectively higher education institutions **(cost that they will place on institutions)**.

Procedures to provide information on the **outcomes** are included in **Methodology Part III – External Quality Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions, section 3.2 External evaluation standards**, in correlation with “Reporting”, described at Section 10.6: “e) The Evaluation Report. The evaluation report must be edited in a clear style, accessible to all those interested. The recommendations and conclusions are adequately emphasized in the text. The evaluation report is published and disseminated. Readers must have the possibility to express their points of view” **(result in clear information on the outcomes)**.

Procedures to provide information on the **follow-up** are included in **Methodology Part III – External Quality Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions, chapter 3.2 External evaluation standards**. The Methodology makes a reference to “the implementation of the recommendations resulted from the self-evaluation and external evaluation” as the third stage of the academic quality evaluation (page 45); f) Implementation of the recommendations. When the nature of the conclusions and recommendations requires time and special forms of implementation, an implementation plan must be elaborated which includes provisions and special deadlines” (page 45) **(result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up)**.

Before the imminent approval of the ESG 2015, the Council decided to analyse the existing Methodology and its subsequent documents, in place since 2007. Whereas the Methodology was not changed since it did not cover two consecutive cyclical (every 5 years) evaluations and also it was validated by the academic community and stakeholders, some provisions of the Guide were adapted/improved to better match the moving reality of the national higher education system. The mechanism to evaluate whether the procedures function well and to determine what improvements would be needed is based on permanent contact of ARACIS leadership with ARACIS evaluators, universities, students and employers. Regular participation of ARACIS representative at

²⁸ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/procedures/>

²⁹ Tariffs for authorization and accreditation of higher education institutions' educational programs and external evaluation of the quality of education, charged by ARACIS (in Romanian):

http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/tarife_ARACIS.pdf

³⁰ http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/HG_nr._1731_-_2006.pdf



National Rectors' Council conferences is the occasion to discuss ARACIS activity and learn about the opinions of the academic community on the agency activity. Critique focuses generally on the way ARACIS advises and judgements have an influence on improving the internal quality assurance and could prevent further non-conformity to criteria, standards and performance indicators in force. In this respect, it should be mentioned that collaboration with the MoNE remains essential. The implementation of ENQA recommendations and EQAR observations were taken into account and applied (see Chapter 12). Procedures to introduce changes vary according to the "level" of the document identified as needing to be changed. Thus, for changes in the Law, the legislative initiative is promoted by the MoNE, in general in cooperation with ARACIS. For the Methodology, ARACIS forwards a proposal to the MoNE; if the proposal is well justified and in accordance with the legislation in force, it is endorsed by the ministry and forwarded to the Government for approval, and can be applied after publication in the Romanian Official Gazzete. Other regulations may be changed by decision of the ARACIS Council, such as Guide and subsequent documents, such as standards of the Permanent Speciality Commissions, evaluation forms etc. Specific changes can be adapted for each activity of ARACIS, at present the obvious example being the Guide for external evaluation of master study domains, the evaluation of engineering study programs for awarding the EUR-ACE Label. For the evaluation of the Law programs in the Republic of Moldova adjustments of the Methodology were proposed by the Permanent Speciality Commission of law and approved by the Council.

The ARACIS Executive Board decided to nominate a Working Group (WG) to assess the impact of the new ESG 2015 on ARACIS **Methodology** and procedures. The activity of the Working Group (WG) started in 2015, after the formal approval of the new ESG 2015 by the ministers responsible with HE in the EHEA. The compatibility of the ARACIS **Methodology** with the provisions of the new ESG 2015 was at first analyzed by a sub-group of the WG, including members of ARACIS technical staff, working in permanent consultation with members of the ARACIS Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions, representatives of students in the Council and members of the Executive Board.

The outcome of this activity was a 103 pages document, in tabular form („Comparative analysis of the compatibility of the ARACIS Methodology with ESG 2015" – first draft 13.10.2016, internal document, in Romanian) which was a detailed comparison grid showing the correspondence between ESG Part 1 and the Criteria, standards and performance indicators used by the agency to externally evaluate quality of HE programs and institutions. Also, the document further refers to the correspondence of the other two parts of the ESG with regulations and internal by-laws of ARACIS. The conclusions of the analysis were that the **Methodology** was in most of its parts compatible with ESG 2015 as far as Standards and general procedures were concerned. However, some of the provisions of the Guidelines of ESG in Parts 1 and 2 of the ESG were not very explicitly addressed. In addition, the concept of evaluation of „master study domains", as a new legal provision for the activity of ARACIS, had to be considered, in both a new version of the **Methodology**, to be approved by Government Decision, and/or Ministerial Orders; the ARACIS Guide and other procedures will be approved by the Council. The comparative analysis was approved by the Executive Board of the Council and presented to the Council for analysis and planning the next steps to be taken.

The first version of the proposal of the revised **Methodology** was approved by the Council and firstly published on ARACIS website on 30.06.2017 (in Romanian), for public debate, and sent to the MoNE for observations. The document was also published on the website of the Ministry; further observations and proposals for completions were received by ARACIS, with significant contribution from the students, until 08.11.2017. The final version of



the revised **Methodology** was approved by the MoNE and submitted for approval by Romanian Government Decision. The document was posted on the Web page of the agency, in Romanian³¹.

An important step of the consultation of stakeholders was the involvement of the internal quality assurance structures of universities („internal evaluators”) at several training sessions (Annex 7.7) to present the new ESG 2015 and their compatibility with the procedures of the agency as well as proposal of the new procedures of the agency. The participants filled in evaluation sheets in which they expressed their opinions and proposals. Contributions on these intended new procedures were included in several sessions of the National Council of Rectors. However, as approval by the Government of a new **Methodology** is neither a simple nor a quick process, adaptation of existing ARACIS regulations by decision of the Council, within the limits of the Law, was also crucial for compliance with ESG. While the standards and performance indicators related to EUR-ACE Label for engineering study programs were developed together with representatives of the employers, their findings were extended to some of the standards and performance indicators in other study fields.

Progress: the ARACIS proposal for the improved Methodology was endorsed by the Ministry of National Education. The Methodology was approved by the Romanian Government as Government Decision No. 915/2017 and it became effective after its publication in the Romanian Official Gazette no. 25/11.01.2018. The most important changes are: increased flexibility of the agency to establish criteria, standards and performance indicators, adapted to the various present and future activities of the agency; better formulation of criteria, standards and performance indicators, in accordance with ESG 2015; adaptation to the changes in legislation. Gradual implementation shall start in February 2018 according to planning approved by the Council.

10.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

ARACIS Compliance

External quality assurance processes are pre-defined and published. The **Methodology** and the ARACIS **Guide** are available on the website of the agency. Changes and additional provisions to the procedure are published without delay on the website.

The most recent addition to the Guide is the “Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees”³². The provisions of the Methodology and Guide are implemented consistently. The external evaluation process include: self-evaluation report of the institution/program/domain (SER) and supporting evidence (Annexes to the SER); a site visit; a report resulting from the external evaluation; follow-up (**quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined**).

One important element to make **consistency** a reality is the work of the Permanent Specialty Commissions: their main role is to judge with the same accuracy all the reports/proposals of the panels which evaluate externally numerous study programs, from different HE institutions, in the same educational domain, bearing in mind that these evaluations occur at different time moments, the panels include different evaluators etc. The conclusions/reports of the Permanent Specialty Commissions and those drafted by the External evaluation panels, also in case of institutional evaluations, are discussed in the meetings of the Department of Accreditation or of the Department of External Evaluation of Quality, as indicated at Section 6 of the SAR. One important positive result of this procedure is the low number of appeals to the judgments/advises the agency had to analyze

³¹

http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/1_Prima_Pagina_web/20.11.2017/14_nov_2017_observatii_supl_la_MEN_241017_final_Metodologie_ARACIS.pdf (translation shall be provided after approval by Government Decision)

³² http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/2017/Guideline_for_periodic_external_evaluation_of_the_fields_of_study_for_the_Master_degrees.pdf



and solve. In the period 2013 – 2017 there were 46 appeals for study programs (first and second cycle) out of 2.314 evaluations and five at institutional level out of 74 external evaluations (**external quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published**).

The evaluation reports of the agency are published on the website of ARACIS. The Guide provides information for institutions on the requirements relative to the content and size of their self-evaluation (assessment) reports, as well as on the Annexes which should include supporting evidence (**report resulting from the external evaluation**).

The stages of the external evaluation are specified in **Methodology Part III External Quality Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions**, section 3.1 *Stages of academic quality evaluation*: “There are three successive stages of academic quality evaluation: a) the elaboration, by the provider or institution, of a quality self-evaluation report; b) the external evaluation of quality; c) the implementation of recommendations resulting from self-evaluation and external evaluation” (page 45) (**The findings of the assessment are summarised in a report according to Standard 2.5 written by a group of external experts according to Standard 2.4**).

For **EUR-ACE Label** additional details are presented at Section 6.

In case of international contract-based evaluation of the 17 study programs in the field of Law in the R. of Moldova (occasional activity 5, Table 5.1), in addition to its own **Methodology**, ARACIS followed the regulation proposed by the Ministry of Education of R. of Moldova, before the Moldavian regulation for accreditation was adopted by the Parliament. The first activity was to adjust the external evaluation methodology of the study programs in the field of Law and of other relevant normative acts in this area, in accordance with the latest European practices in the field. The actual evaluation activity was organized in two steps: **1. evaluation activities** with two or three day visits for each study program, involving three experts for each program and one student in four study programs (June 9th and June 14th 2014, involving in the mission in the R. of Moldova trained expert evaluators (20 teachers, 5 students) who drafted the evaluation documents used for the achievements of the evaluation reports; **2. analysis of visit reports** and drawing up evaluation reports in their primary version, after the evaluation visits. The procedure followed then the general ARACIS procedure for analysis of the reports and approval.

10.4 ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

ARACIS Compliance

Provisions regarding evaluating experts participating in the external evaluation are given in ARACIS **Methodology** in: **1. Part III - External Quality Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions. 1. Section 3.2 External evaluation standards**: “d) Correlation of the procedures and processes applied in the external quality evaluation with the purposes and objectives of quality assurance. Quality assurance and external evaluation of quality are components of the larger processes and procedures for quality assurance and improvement in higher education and must be applied as such. In order to accomplish its purposes and objectives, the procedures and process of the external evaluation of quality assurance must be elaborated and applied so that the following conditions are observed: the external evaluators must have the capacities, competencies and experience necessary for external evaluation; the ARACIS Council must select and include in the Register of Experts those academics from Romania and abroad which are known for their professional and managerial competence, moral integrity and expertise in the field of quality assurance; the ARACIS Council must offer the experts the possibility of training in the field of external quality evaluation; students must be involved in an external evaluation; whenever is possible, international experts must be involved; evaluative statements must always be based on justifying documents and concrete and convincing examples; the recognition of the importance of quality improvement, and of enhancing quality performance are fundamental for the process of quality assurance” (page



47); **(experts are carefully selected)** **2. Part IV - Applications Differentiated by Study Cycles**, section “4.1.1. Provisional authorization to operate and accreditation procedures: “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, which analyzes the self-evaluation report, verifies through visits to the applicant institution, the meeting of the Standards and elaborates its own evaluation report”.

Academic experts from Romania may be included and listed in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators³³ after completing an evaluation procedure, using an electronic facility. Student experts are selected after successfully completing trainings and procedures, organized by student federations recognized at national level (ANOSR, UNSR, USR) with support from ARACIS. They are listed in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators – Students. The ARACIS experts are supported by appropriate training. An overview of the training sessions is given in Annex 7.7. **(experts are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing)**. Additional details are included in Section 9.5.

The independence of the experts is granted by a mechanism of no conflict of interest. Details are given in the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct (see Annex 4.1). The procedure of nominating academic experts in the panels is described in Annex 7.3. The procedure of nominating student experts for missions is described in Annex 7.5.

ARACIS has a mechanism of no conflict of interest. The Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct was revised (Annex 4.1) and updated. Experts are briefed before the mission and site visit on their expected work and role in the panel, as well as on reporting requirements. The provisions of the Code are applied consistently on a permanent basis **(implementing a mechanism of no conflict of interest)**.

Involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, as members of peer panels, is permanent for institutional evaluations, to add a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes. The experts apply for inclusion in the ARACIS Register for foreign (international) experts and send a detailed CV **(involvement of international experts in external quality assurance)**.

The procedure of nominating foreign experts for missions is described in Annex 7.4. Foreign experts are provided before the mission with all documents regarding ARACIS procedures and are briefed before the mission by the Director of mission on their expected role in the panel and reporting procedure. Their obligations are specified in their Contract.

ARACIS has a Consultative Commission, gathering reputed academics, many of them former Council or Commissions members, with experience in quality assurance. One member of the Consultative Commission takes part in external evaluations at institutional level, to follow strict compliance of the procedure and panel activity with ARACIS regulations and rules of conduct.

In Table 10.2 is presented the composition of the site-visit panels, per activities.

Table 10.2

Activity as per Table 5.1	Composition of the site-visit panel	Comments
Evaluation of study programs 1.1*; 2.1*;	Visit panel coordinator - evaluator from the Permanent Specialty Commissions. Members: 2-3 Evaluators from NRE, in the study domain to which the evaluated program is assigned; one student from the NRE-Students,	NRE - National Register of ARACIS Evaluators *Bachelor (“Licenta”)

³³ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/organisation/national-register-of-evaluators/>



3.1*, 4***, 5*	in the study domain or related Employer - member of the Employers Register***	***Engineering SPs for awarding EUR-ACE Label
Evaluation of study programs 1.1**, 2.1**, 3.1**	Visit panel coordinator - evaluator from the Commission of Permanent Specialty Commissions. Members: Evaluator from NRE, in the study domain to which the evaluated program is assigned; one master/doctoral student from the NRE-S, in the study domain	**Master study programs
Institutional evaluations 1.2; 2.2; 3.2	Mission Director - member of ARACIS Council; Mission Coordinator - member of the Institutional Commission for Managerial and Financial Activities; Student Evaluators - 2; Foreign expert - member of the National Register of ARACIS International Evaluators; Advisory Commission Expert - member of the Consultative and Audit Commission; Institutional Commission Expert - member of the Institutional Commission for Managerial and Financial Activities; Program Evaluating Experts - members of the NRE in the each of the domains to which the evaluated programs are assigned. Technical Secretary - from the agency professional staff	Students are nominated by the student organizations at national level: ANOSR, UNSR, USR
Evaluation of Master studies domains	Visit panel president - evaluator from the Permanent Specialty Commission.. Members: 1-3 Evaluators from NRE, in the study domain to which the evaluated program is assigned*; one master/doctoral student from the NRE-S, in the master study domain**	*The number of evaluators is correlated to the number of master study programs in the domain

10.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

ARACIS Compliance

ARACIS **Methodology** is published on ARACIS website (Annex 2.1) and explicitly includes the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators for external evaluations and evaluation results: **1. In *Methodology Part I. Principles of Quality Assurance in Higher Education - Section 1.4 Quality assurance and accreditation* include details on ARACIS activities and the criteria underlying them: “The main objective of ARACIS activities is to assure and improve quality. Accreditation is that process of assuring and improving academic quality through which an education provider is first provisionally authorized to operate as a higher education institution and organize admission sessions, and is then accredited and recognized as a part of the national higher education system, with the right to deliver diplomas, certificates and other documents recognized at national level, to organize graduation, Bachelor, Master and Doctoral examinations. The standards, standards of reference and performance indicators for both assuring quality in already accredited institutions and accrediting newly established institutions are the same. The difference is determined by their level of achievement. In granting the authorization and accreditation of an institution, the minimum level of performance indicators achievement is taken into consideration. In terms of quality assurance, the standards of reference may be set at optimal institutional levels, exceeding the minimum requirement level” (page 10).The ARACIS criteria are pre-defined and published. The ARACIS procedures are evidence-based and developed and used to assure consistent interpretation of the findings, advises and judgments; (on pre-defined and published criteria, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based); Section 1.5 Quality assurance areas approaches the same elements underlying the quality assurance of education, as well as references to the evaluation results: “Three**



fundamental areas of quality assurance in education must be taken into consideration for **the organization and functioning** of an organization which aims to become or already operates as a higher education institution. **The criteria, the standards and the performance indicators** are formulated so as to stress not only the institution's compliance with a predetermined or predefined set of quantitative and qualitative conditions, but also the deliberate, voluntary and proactive engagement of the institution in achieving certain performances, which can be demonstrated through effective outcomes. **The role of the external evaluator, namely ARACIS, is to acknowledge and evaluate the managerial and educational capacity of the education provider, in order to be able, on this basis, to state, then validate or invalidate its functioning publicly and with documentary evidence**" (page 12). **2. Methodology Part III - External Quality Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions** details **the criteria, standards and performance indicators for quality assurance and accreditation**: (pages 17 - 43). "Criteria, standards, and performance indicators apply to quality assurance and accreditation. These are used by higher education institutions and by ARACIS as follows: they (a) represent the reference point for quality management in higher education institutions; (b) offer the framework for collecting information and maintaining databases which institutions can use for internal monitoring and external demonstration of academic quality assurance; (c) are used by ARACIS in the process of external evaluation and assurance of quality, for the purpose of accreditation and development of a quality culture.(...)"(page 17); **3.**In the **Methodology Part IV. Applications Differentiated by Study Cycles**, it is clearly stated that "areas (quality domains), criteria, standards, and performance indicators mentioned in the **Methodology** are formulated so that they preserve their applicability in the areas of quality assurance and accreditation for any type of institution or higher education provider, and for any study program". However, this part offers some differentiating details which regard to a) the provisional authorization to operate and the accreditation of higher education institutions awarding Bachelor Degrees (first cycle); b) the accreditation of Master's Degree awarding institutions; c) the accreditation of Doctorate Degree awarding institutions (**results of the external evaluation are based on predefined and published criteria, which are consistently and coherently interpreted and are based on evidence**).

According to the Law (Annex 1.1), ARACIS external evaluation is finalized with an Advise to the Ministry of National Education, to take a formal decision, which, after approval by Government Decision, is published in the Official Gazette, for first cycle study programs/master studies programs or integrated second cycle programs (such as those leading to regulated professions in the EU – medicine, architecture etc.). The ARACIS advises, for instance in case of first cycle study programs, may be provisional authorizing to operate/accreditation/accreditation denied/maintaining accreditation etc.

For accreditation of higher education providers, the MoNE initiates a "law project" which is forwarded to the Parliament for Decision taking (if approved, the education provider becomes by law part of the Romanian HE System, which grants the institution the right to issue recognized Diplomas etc.). ARACIS' own „judgments" support the Advise to the MoNE and reflect in a concise expression, useful for the institution and its stakeholders, the level of confidence in the activity of the HE provider (i.e. High Degree of Confidence, Confidence, Limited Degree of Confidence, Lack of Confidence – for institutions; Confidence, Limited Confidence, No Confidence – for Study programs, first cycle).

In case of awarding the EUR-ACE Label for engineering first cycle study programs (occasional activity 4, Table 5.1), ARACIS gives an Advise of approval/non approval. In case of approval, the decision is sent to ENAEE for finalizing financial matters (the university should pay a fee to ENAEE). After the fee is paid, ARACIS delivers the EUR-ACE Label certificate for the study program (**outcomes may take different forms, for example, recommendations, judgments or formal decisions**).

In case of international contract-based evaluation of the 17 study programs in the field of Law in the R. of Moldova (occasional activity 5, Table 5.1), the procedure followed then the general ARACIS procedure for analysis of the reports and approval. Description of the process can be found in the "Generalized report" drafted and then approved by the contractor, the Ministry of Education of the R. of Moldova. The Generalized report is



published on the ARACIS website³⁴. The formal outcome of the process (“accreditation”) followed the regulations of the Government of the R. of Moldova.

The criteria for outcomes are the result of large consultations with academics, students, staff and stakeholders. They are developed and permanently improved under the general framework of the ESG. One important result of the project QUALITAS (see Section 8) was a *Report on development of primary, secondary and tertiary quality indicators for internal quality assurance*³⁵ which is the result of such large consultation. Some of the proposals were used in drafting the new *Methodology*. Trainings contribute to consistency of application of criteria, standards and performance indicators (see an overview of training sessions in Annex 7.7). The procedure of approval of outcomes, conclusions, reporting (see Section 10.6) guarantees that the agency follows carefully the consistency of its advises and judgments, based on factual information, regarding compliance with its quality standards.

10.6 ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

ARACIS Compliance

All external evaluation procedures are finalized by reports, which include also a “quality judgment” (in Romanian: „Calificativ” - i.e. „High Degree of Confidence”, „Confidence” etc.). The Report includes an advisory proposal (Advise) to the Ministry of National Education which shall empower it with legal consequence for decision (i.e.: „provisional authorizing to operate”, „accreditation” etc.). Other details on improved ARACIS reporting procedures are given also at Section 12 of the SAR, items 2, 8 - 13.

Information on experts’ involvement in drafting and approval of reports is presented below, as an “outline” in tabular forms/(activities as per Table 5.1), and a description needed for better understanding the process/activity.

An outline of experts’ involvement in drawing up reports at program level is presented in Table 10.3.

Table 10.3

Level of analysis/reporting for Activities 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4* (as per Table 5.1)	Activity/experts	Type of report/involvement of experts	Report advances to:
Panel of experts Panel coordinator: member of the Permanent Specialty Commissions For activity 4*: representatives of stakeholders	Analysis of SER before the site-visit Site-visit/ all panel members For activity 4*: representatives of stakeholders	Visit record form Synthetic report of the evaluation panel / all panel members For activity 4*: evaluation sheet for fulfilment of ENAEE standards for EUR-ACE certification	Permanent Specialty Commissions
Permanent Specialty Commissions	Analysis of Visit record form and Synthetic report of the evaluation panel + additional documents	Evaluation report of the Permanent Specialty Commissions	Department of Accreditation (for proposed judgments of Limited confidence or No-confidence)
Department of Accreditation	Analysis of Evaluation report of the Permanent Specialty Commissions	Report of Department of Accreditation/all members of the department, coordinator of site-visit panel	ARACIS Council

³⁴ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/international-activities/international-evaluations/>

³⁵ http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Proiecte/QUALITAS/PL_3/indicatori_en_online.pdf



ARACIS Council	Analysis of Report of Department of Accreditation	Report of ARACIS Council/all Council members	Ministry of National Education (after solution of appeals procedure is completed) For activity 4*: ENAEE
----------------	---	--	--

Detailed description of the procedure is given below.

The visit panel analyzes, before the visit, the internal evaluation report (self - evaluation) received by the agency; the site visit aims to verify the fulfilment of the quality standards. The panel coordinator is a member of the Permanent Specialty Commissions.

The findings are recorded in the Visit record form, signed by all members of the panel and by the representatives of the evaluated program/institution.

The visit panel members draw up and sign the Synthetic report of the evaluation panel to highlight the main identified points, which contains also the “judgments” and proposals for the schooling capacity (maximum number of students who can be enrolled in the first year of studies). Each member makes its own proposal. After the site-visit, the institution can send to ARACIS comments and additions, as official documents, signed by the Rector, which should reach the agency before the session of the Permanent Specialty Commissions.

The Synthetic report of the evaluation panel and the Visit record form, containing the results of the evaluation, the Visit record, as well as the additional official documents received after the visit, if it is the case, are presented by the panel coordinator to the Permanent Specialty Commission. To ensure the consistency of the evaluations, the Permanent Specialty Commission analyzes the documents and draws up its own evaluation report, assumed and signed by all members of the commission. The report is submitted to ARACIS Council and contains the proposal for the advice and judgment. For the study programs with *Limited confidence* and *No-confidence* judgments, the proposals are also discussed and approved in the Department of accreditation.

The report of the Permanent Specialty Commissions is presented to ARACIS Council. After approval, the Council report, signed by the members of the Executive Board, is sent to MoNE for drafting the Government Decision which is empowering the status of the study program. For awarding the EUR-ACE Label the Report is sent to ENAEE for approval and inclusion in the database of engineering programs holding the EUR-ACE Label.

An outline of experts' involvement in drawing up reports at *institutional level* is presented in Table 10.4.

Table 10.4

Level of analysis/reporting for Activities 1.2, 2.2, 3.2 (as per Table 5.1)	Activity/experts	Type of report/involvement of experts	Reports advance to:
Panel of experts: Director of mission – member of ARACIS Council Panel coordinator: nominated by Council Other experts, as per Table 10.2	Analysis of SER before the site-visit Preparation of panel for site-visit Site-visit/ all panel members	Visit record form at institutional level / all panel members Visit record form at study programs level/program expert Visit record of students/ Student evaluators Report of the foreign evaluator/foreign evaluator Institutional evaluation report/ Director and coordinator of mission	Department of External Quality Evaluation



Department of External Quality Evaluation (Permanent Specialty Commissions can be consulted for study programs)	Analysis of documents in column "Type of report/involvement of experts" + additional documents	Report of the Department of external quality evaluation on the external evaluation of the academic quality in the higher education institution/ all members of department	ARACIS Council
ARACIS Council	Analysis of Report of Department of External Quality Evaluation + additional documents (i.e. letter to the institution/answer to letter signed by the Rector)	Report of ARACIS Council /all Council members ARACIS Council report is accompanied by a Synthetic report of the evaluation results aiming at all stakeholders	Ministry of National Education (final report after solution of appeals procedure is completed)

Detailed description of the procedure is given below.

The visit panel analyzes, before the visit, the internal evaluation report (self - evaluation) received by the agency; the site visit aims to verify the fulfilment of the quality standards. The panel coordinator is a member of the Permanent Specialty Commissions. The visit team/panel is complex, including at least nine experts.

The results of the evaluation are recorded in the following documents:

- Visit record form for evaluation at institutional level (legal, economic, quality assurance aspects) - the filling in is coordinated by the Director of mission (ARACIS Council member). When filling in this, the findings and issues raised by all members of the visiting team are taken into consideration. The content of the document is assumed by all members of the visiting team. The Visit record is signed by them and by the representatives of the evaluated institution.
- For each evaluated study program individual visit record forms are drawn up by the study program evaluators, selected usually, from the members of the Permanent Specialty Commissions.
- The findings regarding the student issues are mentioned in the Visit record drawn up by the evaluating students during the institutional evaluation visit - document filled in by the two students, representatives of the student organizations, who are part of the visiting team. The students draw up and sign a distinct evaluation report - Institutional evaluation report of the evaluating students.
- The foreign evaluator draws up and signs his / her own evaluation report.

All these abovementioned documents support the drafting of the report resulted from the evaluation as a whole, coordinated by the Director of mission and the coordinator - Institutional evaluation report on the external evaluation of the academic education quality in the higher education institution.

The evaluated institution is informed, through a letter drawn up on the basis of the evaluation commission report, on the preliminary results of the evaluation process, a letter to which the university should answer and may bring clarifications. All the documents listed above, including the response letter of the evaluated institution containing its clarifications, will be analyzed within the Department of external quality evaluation, which will draw up its own report - Report of the Department of external quality evaluation on the external evaluation of the academic quality in the higher education institution, proposing to ARACIS Council a Decision and judgment for the evaluated institution.

The Report of the Department of external quality evaluation is presented to ARACIS Council. After approval, the Council report, signed by the members of the Executive Board, is sent to MoNE together with its supporting documents, and is posted on the agency website. MoNE is informed on the final evaluation results after the end of the appeals period. ARACIS Council report is accompanied by a Synthetic report of the evaluation results.



For evaluation of master studies domains – **Activity 3.3, an activity which has not yet started**, description of reporting procedure is according to the published document (link: see Table 10.5). The procedure is similar to that for activities described for study programs.

Reporting for **Activity 5** – evaluation of 17 Law study programs in the R.of Moldova was adapted to the provisions of the contract between the agency and the Ministry of Education of the R.of Moldova. The contract mentioned the obligation for ARACIS to publish a “Generalized Report”, after the completion of all activities of the contract. However, on the webpage of the agency the reports for all study programs were also published, in Romanian, which is the language of the two countries. These reports were drafted by the members of the panels: 20 academics form the National Register of Evaluators and 8 students. The Generalized Report is also published on the agency’s webpage, in Romanian and in English. Information on http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Evaluari/Rapoarte_site/Documente_Moldova/MEducation_RM_Generalized_Report_EN.pdf.

In Table 10.5 is presented a synopsis of published reports, including indication on the webpage access.

Table 10.5

Type of published reports	Activities as per Table 5.1	Details	Webpage
ARACIS Reports of external evaluations of study programs	<p>1.1 Provisional authorizing to operate of study programs (Bachelor/Licență; Master)</p> <p>2.1 Accreditation of study programs (Bachelor/Licență; Master)</p> <p>3.1 Periodic (cyclical) evaluation of Study programs (Bachelor/Licență; Master)</p>	<p>The reports are available in Romanian, on the page Evaluation Results (in Romanian: <i>Rezultate evaluări</i>), which includes the monthly Decisions of ARACIS Council, as such:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The list of study programs analyzed and validated in the respective meeting of ARACIS Council. • ARACIS Reports, grouped on Permanent Specialty Commissions, for each study program analyzed and validated in the respective monthly meeting of ARACIS Council. 	<p>http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari/</p>
ARACIS Reports of external institutional evaluations	<p>1.2 Provisional authorizing to operate of HE institutions</p> <p>2.2 Accreditation of HE institutions</p> <p>3.2 Periodic (cyclical) evaluation of HE institutions</p>	<p>The reports are available in Romanian, on the page Institutional Evaluations (in Romanian: <i>Evaluări instituționale</i>), where you can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The list of universities in Romania, evaluated by ARACIS and the respective reports for each institutional evaluation • The page Institutional evaluations in alphabetical order (in Romanian: <i>Evaluări instituționale ordonate alfabetic</i>), which includes the list of universities in Romanian, in alphabetical order, by the name of the city where the university has its premises, and the respective reports for each institutional evaluation. <p>Synthetic reports for institutional</p>	<p>http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari-institutionale/</p> <p>http://www.aracis.ro/index.php?id=398#1081</p>



		<p>evaluations are available for each university, in Romanian.</p> <p>Within QUALITAS project, 20 synthetic reports were translated in English.</p>	<p>http://www.aracis.ro/en/projects/qualitas/pl-ii-quality-assessment-and-accreditation/</p>
<p>ARACIS Reports of external evaluations of Master studies domains</p>	<p>2.3 Accreditation of Master studies domains</p> <p>3.3 Periodic (cyclical) evaluation of Master studies domains</p>	<p>External evaluations of Master studies domains have not yet been conducted.</p> <p>Following the conduct of these evaluations, the reports will be available in Romanian, on the page Evaluation Results (in Romanian: <i>Rezultate evaluări</i>).</p>	<p>http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari/</p>
<p>ARACIS Reports of external evaluations of Engineering Study Programs in view of awarding the EUR-ACE Label</p>	<p>4. Evaluation of Engineering Study Programs</p>	<p>The reports are available in Romanian, on the page Evaluation Results (in Romanian: <i>Rezultate evaluări</i>), which includes the monthly Decisions of ARACIS Council, as such:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The list of study programs analysed and validated in the respective meeting of ARACIS Council. • ARACIS Reports, grouped on Permanent Specialty Commissions, for each study program analysed and validated in the respective monthly meeting of ARACIS Council. <p>Reports for Engineering Study Programs are included in the Engineering Sciences Permanent Specialty Commissions: Engineering Sciences I (Commission C10) and Engineering Sciences II (Commission C11).</p>	<p>http://www.aracis.ro/activitati-internationale/evaluari-internationale/</p>
<p>ARACIS Reports of International/cross-border evaluations</p>	<p>5. Evaluation of 17 Study Programs in R. of Moldova</p>	<p>The reports are available in Romanian, on the page International Evaluations (in Romanian: <i>Evaluări internaționale</i>), where you can access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reports for the 17 evaluated study programs in Law, available in Romanian. • The Generalized Report on the results of the external evaluation of study programs in Law of the Republic Moldova, compared to a reference from at least one European country – report available both in Romanian and English. 	<p>http://www.aracis.ro/activitati-internationale/evaluari-internationale/</p> <p>http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Evaluari/Rapoarte_site/Documente_Moldova/MEducation_RM_Generalized_Report_EN.pdf</p>

The effectiveness of the agency's approach of reporting is still to be improved. The specificity of interpreting public documents in Romania (only “official”, signed, full length documents are credible!) had to be taken into account. Thus, all Reports are still published, including the “intermediate/internal” ones, such as the Reports of students, of the foreign expert, of the departments etc. This has made necessary the publication of the “Synthetic Report” for institutional evaluations, based on a template with relevant information for the general public,



procedure which has been generalized. Easy access to reports is related to the structure of the webpage, which is still under reconstruction. Participation of ARACIS as partner in the EQAR project “The Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR)” is an incentive and provides a framework for better distribution of information. Also, the project with the World Bank (see Section 9.5) provides technical and financial support for improving the webpage.

10.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

ARACIS Compliance

New distinct procedures for addressing **appeals** and **complaints** were developed and applied after approval of ESG 2015. An overview is presented below. As shown before, in the period 2013 – 2017 there were 46 appeals for study programs (first and second cycle) out of 2.314 evaluations and five at institutional level out of 74 external evaluations. Total or partial acceptance of appeals was: study programs - 16 appeals out of 46; at institutional level - none. Usually, **appeals** were received in cases when the ARACIS judgment/Advise to the MoNE was at a lower level from the expected one. The institution challenged in general procedural flaws, leading in its opinion to insufficient evidence of the judgment. **Complaints** may refer to alleged lack of integrity or improper behaviour of external evaluators. If they prove to be supported by facts, these are to be addressed according to the provisions of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. ARACIS has received only one written complaint, from one private university, but there was no evidence of the reality of the situation and the matter was settled with the university without further consequences.

For Activities 1, 2 and 3, a brief description of relevant elements regarding complaints and appeals is given below.

ARACIS endeavors to have with higher education institutions constructive collaboration relationships, based on systematic and ongoing communication. In certain situations, higher education institutions may express their dissatisfaction through the submission of complaints and/or appeals.

Appeals (“contestații” – in Romanian) can be submitted following the external evaluation conducted by ARACIS evaluation panels. The appeal is made in writing, is signed by the university rector, confirmed with the university stamp/seal and is registered at ARACIS Public Relations, Registry, Archive and Secretariat Office. Appeals may contest the awarded advise/judgment after the external evaluation of study programs or the awarded advise/judgment after the external institutional evaluation.

Appeals regarding the awarded Advise after the external evaluation of study programs

- Can be submitted within two weeks from receipt of the report and are analyzed by the Executive Board of ARACIS Council, which designates a commission for resolution of the appeal that analyzes the appeal and documentation resulting from the visit. The commission drafts a report to be validated by the Accreditation Department. The ARACIS Council, after analyzing the documents and following debates, drafts the final ARACIS Report.

Appeals regarding the awarded Advise/Judgment after the external institutional evaluation

- Appeals can be submitted within two weeks from the publishing of the report. The Executive Board of ARACIS Council reanalyzes the report and invites the university rector and contact person at ARACIS premises for a clarification discussion. If, after this meeting, the representatives of the higher education institution maintain their appeal, the Executive Board of ARACIS Council shall designate a technical commission for resolution of the appeal, which, based on evaluation documents, checks whether the procedural flaws mentioned in the appeal are real or not. If the procedural flaws are found to be real, the commission proposes to the ARACIS Council to resume the evaluation procedures in order to correct the reported issues. The ARACIS Council approves, at the



proposal of the Executive Board, the composition of an additional appeal panel that includes other evaluators who will carry out an additional visit at the higher education institution and who will draft a new report after the visit.

- Within 5 working days from the ARACIS meeting in which the results of the appeal were approved, the Agency publishes on its website the content of the appeal as well as the Report of ARACIS Council regarding the resolution of the appeal.

Complaints (“reclamații” – in Romanian) can be filled following the external evaluation services carried out by ARACIS. Complaints are made in writing and have to be registered at ARACIS premises within 5 working days from the evaluation visit. If the reported violations of the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct are found to be real, the ARACIS Council may decide to resume the evaluation procedures in order to correct the reported issues.

Usually, following institutional evaluations, higher education institutions may send some referrals and complaints by means of their response to the *Information letter regarding the awarded judgement*, and in some cases the evaluation process has been corrected through these referrals.

All the other complaints addressed to the Agency by different public institutions or citizens and the content of which does not concern an evaluation process, are settled in accordance with the provisions of Law 233/2002 regulating the petition solving activities with subsequent amendments and completions, transposed into a formalized procedure at the Agency level.

Details about the **appeals** at the **judgments** given by ARACIS can be found in the Reports of the evaluation, which contain paragraphs regarding complaints, for:

Apollonia University of Iasi (http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/Contestatie_UAI_02.pdf,
http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/Referat_Comisie_tehnica_de_solutionare_a_contestatiei_04.pdf)

Atheneum University of Bucharest – no additional information mentioned in the Report – during discussions the university decided to give-up the appeal

Bioterra University of Bucharest (http://proiecte.aracis.ro/uploads/media/Contestatie_Bioterra.pdf ,
http://proiecte.aracis.ro/uploads/media/Referat_comisie_tehnica.pdf)

The reported issues were verified and found to be unfounded; in one case even the university mentioned that the issues claimed „were exaggerated”, i.e. Bioterra University of Bucharest - as it is mentioned in the minutes of the discussions with ARACIS on 17.10.2016 (in Romanian).

Regarding complaints, no separate written complaints were received.

For **Activity 4**, as per Table 5.1 (awarding EUR-ACE label), the same procedures are followed and they are compliant to ESG, as the activity is performed together with the current external evaluation of study programs (in engineering). For this specific occasional activity - EUR-ACE Label evaluation and awarding – compliance to ESG Part 1 is as per comparison grid presented in Annex 8. **Reference to this activity was requested by EQAR, to be included in the SAR.**

For **Activity 5**, the results of the external evaluation were sent to the Ministry of Education of the R. of Moldova for observations and comments. The ministry asked for a second evaluation for four study programs, for which considered that available information was not fully supporting the conclusion. ARACIS met the requirement and produced an improved report, after a second visit performed by a different panel. This report was fully endorsed by the ministry, together with the results reported initially for the other 13 study programs. However, this activity and procedure cannot be considered as an appeals or complaints procedure coming from any of the 17 study programs which were evaluated by ARACIS, but from the M.of National Education as beneficiary of the Contract.

11. Information and opinions of stakeholders

This aspect was approached at Section 9.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis. Full details can be found in Annex 6.1 (Quality Barometer 2015 translated into English in 2016³⁶). The main conclusions drawn from the “Thematic analysis” on the opinion of stakeholders are presented as an independent SWOT – type analysis.

Quality evaluation from the employers` point of view is an external process, the socio-economic stakeholders being direct beneficiaries of the educational outcomes. From their perspective, the external evaluation of the educational process results reveals the positive and negative aspects, confirming for the most part the perceptions of teachers and students. A summary of the issues raised in the questionnaires and interviews performed with the representatives of the socio-economic environment is shown in Tables 11.1 and 11.2 below:

Table 11.1

Dimension	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
1. Evaluation criteria upon employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using objective criteria based on the amount of professional training, experience and how one conducts during the interview The importance given to a higher level of training (Master) The importance given to transversal skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of appropriate importance bestowed upon certain skills (creativity, proactive behaviour etc.)
2. Involvement into the HEI educational process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertaking some responsibilities in acquiring practical skills of the higher education graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of involvement into the internship programs
3. Evaluation of HEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness on the HEI role in the training of youth Awareness on the HEI role in research Critical evaluation of HEI according to the professional profile of graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of a coherent internal evaluation frame of HEI from the employers point of view
4. Professional training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness on the importance of the professional training process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient investments in the development of human resources

Table 11.2

Dimension	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
1. Evaluation criteria upon employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive involvement of the employers` representatives in the execution of curricular projections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of a cooperation framework for the development of educational programs together with the socio-economic stakeholders The gap between the perceptions of employers and HEI Lack of interest in closing the gap between the positive and negative skills acquired by graduates and requirements of employers

³⁶ http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/2017/Quality_Barometer_2016_EN.rar

2. Involvement into the HEI educational process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Active involvement of the stakeholders within the socio-economic environment in activities and projects together with HEI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of a good communication between HEI and the socio-economic stakeholders
3. Evaluation of HEI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creation of solid partnerships between universities and academic environment for the execution of practical and internship activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of availability of employers to offer support during the practice/internship
4. Professional training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Existing programs providing funding for the development of programs of practice/internship national and European wide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduced ability of the socio-economic stakeholders to assist students during periods of practice/internship ● Difficulties in accessing funding

12. Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and agency's resulting follow-up (for second and subsequent reviews only)

During the previous review (in 2013), the [ENQA coordinated Review Panel](#) made several [recommendations](#), which were addressed as follows:

1. [ARACIS should plan to involve students fully as evaluators in its forthcoming new methodology for program evaluations and to involve students and stakeholders in the work of permanent and speciality commissions](#)

Involvement of students as evaluators in its forthcoming new methodology for program evaluations

The ARACIS Council approved a Decision in September 2017 for the inclusion of students in the review panels of programs evaluations. For instance, the first panels including a student member evaluate first cycle study programs at University "Ovidius" of Constanta (Agriculture), University "Babes-Bolyai" (Cultural tourism), University Politehnica of Timisoara (Technologies and Telecommunication Systems). ARACIS is still developing planning procedures to evaluate, in one mission, "clusters" (two or more study programs from a given domain) at the same university. Thus, one student evaluator could participate in the panel together with the other academic members. The legal basis for the involvement of students as evaluators for program evaluations is included in the new **Methodology**, approved by Government Decision (December 2017), which now solves also the problem of covering additional costs.

Involvement of students in the works of the Permanent Specialty Commissions

ARACIS has taken steps to include students in all Permanent Specialty Commissions. The first step was the modification of the Internal By-Laws of ARACIS to allow for inclusion of students in the work of the 13 Permanent Specialty Commissions – "The Regulation on the Organization and Functioning of ARACIS". The inclusion of the students was realised progressively, starting with the works of four Commissions. The involvement was fully implemented in January 2017; the selection followed „The Procedure of selection and nomination of the students in the Permanent Specialty Commissions”³⁷ (see overview in Annex 7.2).

³⁷ Procedure of selection and nomination of the students in the Permanent Specialty Commissions (in Romanian): http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Posturi_vacante/2017/Procedura_selectie_studenti_comisii_de_specialitate.doc



Involvement of stakeholders in the works of the Permanent Specialty Commissions

Involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation activities of ARACIS started with setting up in December 2015 of “Employers’ Register” to replace the “Employers’ Commission”, by the 17.12.2015 Decision of the ARACIS Council. The change of the structure was imposed by the new ESG and the approach of the agency regarding the role of the employers’ representatives in the evaluation processes, already in place in the EUR-ACE Methodology. At the moment, the employers are involved in all evaluation of study programs for which the higher education institution requests the award of EUR-ACE Label. For other Commissions, work is in progress to identify real representatives of employers. The immediate next step is involving employers from health care and economics study domains; other domains shall be better covered until the end of first semester of 2018.

2. ARACIS will consider the benefits for students and stakeholders for there to be a main report on each university and higher education institution with the possibility to report additionally on program domains at each institution where relevant

This aspect was considered; the decision was that the “Synthetic Report” of institutional evaluations should include this aspect. Further progress is expected in relation with the improved website structure. Additional reporting on study program domains remains a target: the first reports are to be related to the evaluation of master studies domains (fields), which shall begin in 2018 according to the new section of the Guide.

3. ARACIS will continue its work to provide support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions to adopt an improvement focus to their work on quality assurance

Support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions remained an important activity of the Agency.

In 2015, ARACIS organized and conducted face-to-face trainings under the framework of the EU-funded project “Development and consolidation of quality culture in Romanian higher education system - QUALITAS”, implemented by ARACIS during April 2014 – December 2015, in partnership with the CEENQA. This project was focused on continuous improvement of quality in higher education institutions, development of managerial skills at institutional and system level.

In 2017, ARACIS organized a training session for 94 representatives of universities working in their internal quality assurance structures, on the new ARACIS Standards for the External Periodic Evaluation of Accredited Master Study domains, published in the “Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees” (see Annex 7.7).

ARACIS publishes and disseminates “Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education” (QAR). QAR is a biannual academic publication which focuses on quality assurance in higher education. The journal aims to become an instrument for the transfer of best practices and to support communication between internal and external experts, as well as to contribute to the development of a quality assurance culture amongst the universities and higher education institutions. The review is distributed by ARACIS to all higher education institutions.

The universities` staff can also contribute with articles for QAR.³⁸

4. ARACIS will continue to improve gender representation at all levels of the work of ARACIS

In its *Procedure of selecting and appointing of new members of the Permanent Specialty Commissions*, “gender balanced representation” is stated as one of the principles.

In the Ministerial Order no. 5751/ 2015³⁹ regarding the procedure of selecting, through public competition, of the ARACIS Council members, “multi-cultural and gender balanced representation” is stated as one of the four main selection criteria.

³⁸ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publications/qar-magazine/about-qar-magazine/>



Presently, in the ARACIS Council the percentage of women is 21.05%. In the Executive Board, 2 (the vice-president and one of the department directors) of five members are women. In the 13 Permanent Specialty Commissions the total percentage of women is 34,58%, but the repartition is uneven; this situation partially reflects the differences in the presence of women in some study fields but it is still a matter of concern and further work of the agency.

ARACIS signed in 2017, as partner, the Grant Agreement for the EU Horizon 2020 funded project 'Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation — TARGET'⁴⁰, project coordinated by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) - Austria, that will be implemented for a 48 months period; work is in progress (see Section 14).

5. ARACIS will make more widely known its establishment of a 'stakeholders advisory committee' and consider how to involve social partners, such as employers organizations and trades unions in its work, so that there is a body formally empowered to advise the Council of ARACIS on how to ensure that the Agency's valuable work is better known to stakeholders, and advise the Council on how to respond to the needs of stakeholders for information about higher education and higher education institutions in Romania (and further afield)

The Employers' Register

As shown, the Employers' Register was set up in December 2015, as a result of the replacement of the Employers' Commission in place at that time.

Periodic training of regular evaluators from the ARACIS National Evaluators Register - Engineering section - is also organized. This is usually part of the training seminars organized by the Agency as separate session for training with regard to EUR-ACE standards and methodology. The last event of this kind was organized in 2017 (Braşov, 23 - 24.02.2017 and Sibiu, 16 - 17.03.2017), as it was stated before.

Stakeholders' representative in ARACIS Council

For its November 2017 meeting, ARACIS Council received two proposals for persons delegated to represent the employers' federations in the Council. Based on an analysis of the Executive Board, the representative of the General Union of Romanian Industrialists⁴¹ was appointed as full member. The new Council member and representatives of other stakeholders, already Council members (trade union, students), together with other members of the Council, will draft a strategy to significantly enhance participation of the stakeholders in ARACIS activities.

6. ARACIS will ensure that as well as any additions that the Council of ARACIS approves to the criteria its evaluators are required to employ in making their judgments, that criteria required to meet the requirements of a professional body are referred to on the ARACIS web site (with a web link) and brought directly to the attention of those to whom the criteria will be applied

We think this recommendation originated from a misunderstanding during the Review Panel visit, which was commented by ARACIS, but the panel kept it as such in their report.

All the criteria are published on ARACIS website in Romanian⁴². Also, part of these criteria, are published in English⁴³.

³⁹ Procedure of selecting, through public competition, of the ARACIS Council members (in Romanian): http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Posturi_vacante/2017/Consiliu/Procedura_de_selectare_prin_concurs.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://www.ihs.ac.at/research-groups/socio-ecological-transformation-research/projects/target/>

⁴¹ <http://en.ugir.ro/>

⁴² <http://www.aracis.ro/proceduri/>

⁴³ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/procedures/>



7. With the introduction of its new evaluation methodology ARACIS will provide further specific and separate face-to-face training sessions for program and institutional evaluators, to be supplemented by training via its VLE (Virtual Learning Environment)

In addition to presentations at points 3 and 5 (see above), Annex 7.7 includes an overview of the many ARACIS face-to-face training sessions organized for expert evaluators from the National Register of Evaluators. Training via ARACIS Virtual Learning Environment remains a very useful complementary tool. During 2013-2017, ARACIS provided face-to-face training sessions to over 450 evaluators registered in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators, that participate both in program and institutional evaluations. Also, ARACIS provided support in the organisation of the training of around 200 students that were afterwards registered in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators – Students.

Face-to-face trainings organized in the framework of the project “QUALITAS” addressed topics such as new aspects in quality assurance and assessment, self-assessment report of the universities, follow-up procedures, the activity of the internal structures of quality assurance, quality management: objectives for applying the new ESGs, procedure for evaluation for distance learning programs.

Face-to-face training sessions organized in 2016 and 2017 covered topics such as: elements of ethics and professional conduct during external evaluation visits, ARACIS *Methodology* in the context of new ESGs, EUR-ACE Standards, good practices in institutional evaluations and program evaluations, standards for the external evaluation of Master study domains etc.

In addition to face-to-face training sessions, in 2015, ARACIS organized online courses for ARACIS expert evaluators and for the staff of the higher education institutions. The main topics were: Procedures for Master studies, European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education – Module I, Specific Standards of the Permanent Specialty Commissions etc.

These online courses were conducted in the sustainability phase of the project "e-Education System for Quality Evaluation in Higher Education in Romania (SeECIS)", project implemented by ARACIS between October 2011 - May 2013, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Operational Program Increasing Economic Competitiveness.

8. ARACIS will publish all its evaluation reports (including, eventually, those for evaluations already completed) on its web site as individual searchable documents that include the necessary authentication details

ARACIS has published on its website all evaluation reports and the search on the website was made easier. For instance, the study programs reports can be found on: <http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari/> and the institutional reports can be found on: <http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari-institutionale/>

In the comments ARACIS sent to the 2013 Review Panel it was stated that, to post the reports on the agency web-site is the only possibility to make public signed and sealed documents. These are the only type of documents which are considered as “official”. Other type of documents, such as word or pdf documents (not signed and sealed) are likely to have no official value for the reader.

As stated before, within the new signed project QAFIN, implemented during May 2017 – May 2020, coordinated by the Ministry of National Education and co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Operational Program "Administrative Capacity" 2014-2020⁴⁴, ARACIS has the responsibility and budget to create a new website, because the current website is outdated. ARACIS Project team is working to prepare the necessary documents for the bidding procedure of developing and purchasing a new website. On the ARACIS home page was added a link and an explanation of how to find and download individual reports.

⁴⁴ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/projects/qafin/>



9. For its new evaluation methodology ARACIS should broaden its view of the intended readership of its reports at program and institutional levels to embrace potential students and employers of Romanian graduates

and

10. ARACIS should develop shorter and clearly written reports in accessible language specifically for potential students and employers of Romanian graduates

At the moment, in the general social situation in Romania, we consider that ARACIS reports should still be detailed and well supported by facts. The idea that they are "technical" and more difficult to be understood by the general public might be partially justified, but this procedure was validated over the years by the rather small number of appeals (see also Section 10.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals).

It must be mentioned that the Report of the students the Report of the foreign expert are published in full; these are more synthetic documents and contribute well to the purpose of making Reports more "reader friendly".

Moreover, following the institutional evaluations, as of 28.11.2013 ARACIS drafts concise "Synthetic Reports" to help potential students and employers of Romanian graduates to read about the findings and the results of ARACIS evaluations. These reports are published on ARACIS website. To this end a template was developed and approved by the Council. On the ARACIS website the "**Synthetic (Summary) Report**" ("**Raport de sinteza**") for institutional evaluations, as part of the Institutional Evaluation Report ("**Raport de evaluare institutionala**") is already published (in Romanian) for the universities evaluated in the period 2013 – 2017. For the 20 universities evaluated under the project QUALITAS the Summary Reports were also translated into English and published on ARACIS website:

<http://www.aracis.ro/en/eval-results/institutional-evaluations/>

In terms of program evaluations, ARACIS published on its website the report of the Council and that document is also concise and summed up; thus, the interested persons have access to the main findings and the result of these evaluations.

11. To identify what these shorter reports should cover, the Panel also recommended that ARACIS should undertake a research exercise to identify the information that students and employers need to draw on in order to identify programs and institutions when making choices, and consider the possibility for institutional evaluations of issuing a main report with the flexibility to report additionally on program domains

As per ARACIS Progress Report (2015), the agency already has a precedent of involvement in research of students needs through its partnership in ESU's QUEST project⁴⁵. This exercise was also part of the project QUALITAS in which the questionnaires included many questions to investigate on students and employers opinions.

As a result of the research to measure the perceptions of the employers, teachers and students towards the policies and the quality of the Romanian Higher Education by the application of these questionnaires, ARACIS developed two reports, "Policy paper. Institutional policies and strategies in Higher Education" and „The Quality Barometer. Quality Monitor of the Romanian Higher Education System". These reports were written in Romanian and then translated into English⁴⁶.

More information can be found in the new "Quality Barometer"⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ <http://www.esu-online.org/asset/News/6068/QUEST-for-quality-for-students-publication-Part1.pdf>

⁴⁶ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publications/aracis-publications/>

⁴⁷ http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/2017/Quality_Barometer_2016_EN.rar



12. ARACIS should group the reports of program evaluations and institutional evaluations that have already been published on the ARACIS web site, so that all program evaluation reports for a particular university or other higher education institution can be viewed and accessed on the same web page(s) and that this should also be a feature to be considered when ARACIS reports produced under the new evaluation methodology are presented on its website

and

13. ARACIS will be prepared enhance its Information Technology arrangements to enable it to deliver improved performance, storage and organisation of data and the ARACIS website

ARACIS has worked and it is currently working to implement the proposed recommendations which would make reports much easier to search. ARACIS made all the steps to improve performance, storage and organisation of data on the ARACIS website. But the current website is outdated and it does not allow to make a real reorganization.

However, one should keep in mind the difficulty and required time to identify funding and implement the technical solutions (hardware and software). Thus, within the new signed project QAFIN, ARACIS has the responsibility and budget to create a new website.

Within this project, ARACIS will modernize the IT system, web platforms and the purchase of servers and IT equipments which will improve the performance, the storage and the organization of data (see also point 8 above). This equipment shall replace the one currently in use, starting 2018 – 2019, only after the legal requirements of keeping it in use a specified number of years are met.

14. ARACIS will strengthen the existing links between the Chairs of the Permanent Commissions and the Council through creating a new advisory committee of Chairs of the Permanent Commissions

The Council members are following the works of the Permanent Specialty Commissions by participating at their meeting sessions without having the right to vote. This participation aims at unifying the views of the Permanent Specialty Commissions and to improve consistency of applying the criteria; therefore, we do not see the need of a new structure as a new advisory committee – as per the recommendation of the panel, which would induce more bureaucracy, an unnecessary intermediate link and also further costs.

Moreover, ARACIS believes that the agency already has a complex organization chart; the levels of decision making in place are meant to assure consistency of decisions; the agency has already a consultative structure. Creating a new structure is, from our point of view, bringing a burden on the activity of the agency and would also induce additional costs. However, the Chairs of the Permanent Specialty Commissions meet regularly with the occasions of trainings of evaluators and Council meetings.

15. ARACIS will enhance its follow-up procedures for all completed evaluations, to require a concise report after two years to the relevant Permanent Commission (with indications of supporting evidence) that shows how institutions have responded to their institutional and program evaluation reports; and require in its new evaluation methodology that those evaluating programs and institutions include in their reports an analysis of how the subject of the evaluation has responded to the previous external evaluation and the effectiveness of the actions taken.

Institutional evaluations

As per ARACIS Progress Report (2015), "Part 3 of the *Guide for quality assurance activities at program and institutional level* has two additional procedures to be mentioned: a year after the external review the university produces a letter that informs the agency about the way in which observations and recommendations given in the report were taken into account. Secondly, three years after the review the agency deploys a short site visit in



order to analyze together with the university the progress registered since the external review and to discuss the institution's intentions on quality management issues".

Until now, ARACIS has focused on the consistent follow-up for those universities which had quality assurance problems, at its previous evaluation, with the implementation of the quality assurance standards.

Program evaluations

As per ARACIS Progress Report (2015), "for program evaluations, the Council adopted a Decision (24.09.2015) which reinforces and clarifies these procedures: the experts should, in institutional as well in study program evaluations, offer to the institutions a relevant number of recommendations. In the next evaluation, the experts should look, as a priority, at the degree of how the recommendations were addressed. Also, the universities should forward, in two years time from the decision of the Council, to the Permanent Specialty Commissions a brief report on how the recommendations of the ARACIS experts were addressed."

16. ARACIS will continue to work with universities and other higher education institutions to support and enhance their capacity for self-evaluation

As we already mentioned above (*see actions taken by ARACIS under Recommendation number 3*), during 2013-2017, ARACIS provided various trainings to academics and university staff involved in internal quality assurance, aiming to offer support in conducting the self-evaluation, in line with ARACIS procedures. The trainings covered various topics, such as: new aspects in quality assurance and assessment, self-assessment report of the universities, follow-up procedures, the activity of the internal structures of quality assurance, quality management: objectives for applying the new ESGs, procedure for evaluation for distance learning programs, ARACIS **Methodology** in the context of new ESGs, EUR-ACE standards, good practices in institutional evaluations and program evaluations, standards for the external evaluation of Master study domains etc. (see Annex 7.7).

17. ARACIS will propose to the Ministry and its stakeholders that the statutory period for reviews be amended in order to confer greater flexibility and enable ARACIS to manage its workload more efficiently.

From the discussions with the Ministry of National Education it resulted that this recommendation has a long term policy implication and shall be considered when appropriate. At the moment this SAR was forwarded to ENQA (29.11.2017), the project for modification of the Law, to confer ARACIS more flexibility in using its resources, was approved by the specialty commissions of the Romanian Parliament and it is in the procedure of being approved by the Senate Plenary.

The revised version of the **Methodology** was drafted and approved. At the moment this SAR was forwarded to ENQA (29.11.2017), the Ministry of National Education had approved and endorsed the proposal of the new **Methodology**. The document was sent for final approval by Government Decision of the Romanian Government and approved in December 2017.

18. ARACIS will seek external funding to undertake system-wide analysis projects on Romanian higher education, including projects with students which will require the more active participation of students.

During April 2014 – December 2015, ARACIS implemented the project "Development and consolidation of quality culture in Romanian higher education system - QUALITAS", in partnership with the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). The project was co-financed from the Social European Fund by the Sector Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

In the framework of this project, ARACIS undertook a system analysis on the topic of quality in Romanian higher education system, by conducting three surveys on representative samples of employers, university teaching staff and students for measuring their perception of the policies and quality of Romanian higher education system. The results of this system-wide analysis are included in the publication „The Quality Barometer. Quality Monitor of the Romanian Higher Education System”, which includes also information on the general context of the European



Higher Education Area, an analysis of Romanian higher education during 2000-2014 and aspects related to evolution, trends and priorities in higher education in the context of EHEA.

Also, other publications were elaborated during the QUALITAS project: „Policy paper – Recommendations of institutional policies and institutional strategies in higher education”; „Summary report on trends in the evolution of quality in higher education following the assessments made”; „Quality Assurance Review For Higher Education Vol. 6, Nr. 1, December 2015”. All these publications are available on ARACIS website⁴⁸.

Students were actively involved in this project through various activities, such as: participation in the evaluation panels of 20 institutional external evaluations that were conducted in 2015, in the framework of the project; participation as respondents (1.533 students) to the system analysis on the topic of quality in Romanian higher education system; participation of 70 students in the training organised for the inclusion in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators – Students, training that included among the trainers also student trainers.

Also, ARACIS is implementing, as partner, the project “Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating quality standards QAFIN”, coordinated by the Ministry of National Education and co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Operational Program "Administrative Capacity" 2014-2020. The implementation period of the project is of 36 months, between May 2017 - May 2020. One of the envisaged results of this project is a study on data and good practices at European level regarding quality assurance and classification in higher education, as well as on the impact of current practices, at national level. This study will be elaborated by World Bank experts, together with an expert that will contribute with national expertise. The study will use comparative data and analysis at European level, will identify examples of good practice at European level, as well as legislative changes at national level with impact on current methodologies. Also, it will assess the impact that current practices have had on increasing the performance of the higher education system.

Information about the QAFIN project has been disseminated in the ENQA Newsletter from September, 2017⁴⁹.

19. ARACIS will take steps to make the "Quality Barometer" publications more widely known.

The "Quality Barometer" published as a result of the QUALITAS project were written both in Romanian and English, with the purpose of reaching a wider audience. The electronic version of this publication is available on ARACIS website⁵⁰.

Also, information about the project and the "Quality Barometer" was also published in the ENQA Newsletter from March, 2016⁵¹.

ARACIS distributed the printed version of the Quality Barometer to universities that were evaluated within QUALITAS project. Communication based on Quality Barometer results were presented to interested parties, including the National Rectors' Council.

20. ARACIS will publish its "Code of Professional Ethics in the Evaluation Activities for the Authorisation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in the Field of Higher Education in Romania" and its Quality Manual in easy-to-find locations on the its web site forthwith and likewise publish the membership of its "Permanent Commission".

ARACIS has published on its website the „Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS regarding the quality assurance and assessment in higher education in Romania”, on the Procedures page: <http://www.aracis.ro/en/procedures/>.

⁴⁸ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publications/aracis-publications/>

⁴⁹ <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/aracis-works-to-improve-public-policies-and-to-enhance-the-quality-of-regulations/>

⁵⁰ <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publications/aracis-publications/>

⁵¹ <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/qualitas-develops-quality-culture-in-romania/>



Direct link:

http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_Proceduri/2017/Code_of_ethics_and_rules_of_conduct_ARACIS_2017.pdf.

ARACIS Organizational chart was modified to permit the creation of the Internal Quality Assurance Department. In 2017, it was hired an expert specialized in internal quality assurance who is working on a ARACIS Quality Manual. ARACIS has also published the membership of its Permanent Specialty Commissions on its website: <http://www.aracis.ro/en/organisation/specialty-commissions/>.

Following ARACIS request for renewal of its listing in the Register, based on 2013 ENQA co-ordinated report, in its letter of approval of application, **EQAR** made a series of **observations** which have been addressed as it is shown below.

1. The review report noted that ARACIS was in the course of developing a new methodology for accreditation and evaluation of master domains. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from ARACIS on further progress made, and noted that the detailed procedures and criteria to be used are still under development. The Register Committee underlined that ARACIS will be expected to make a Substantive Change Report once the new methodology has been finalized and is being rolled out. (ESG 2.2 - ESG 2005 version)

The *Specific Procedure for the External Periodic Evaluation of Accredited Master Study domains* was approved in 2014 by Ministerial Order, Published in the Official Gazette, Part I nr. 236/2014⁵².

This Specific Procedure aimed to give universities more autonomy and flexibility in developing new Master Study programs, better adapted in relation with the labour market, internationalization and further research fields. This new procedure completes but does not replace or modify, for external evaluation of Master Study programs, the existing ARACIS **Methodology**.

After the approval and the applying of this Procedure, ARACIS sent to EQAR a Substantive Changes Report (SCR) in March, 2016. EQAR requested some clarification regarding SCR, ARACIS responded to these clarifications and in September 2016, EQAR took note of the SCR.

In October 2017, ARACIS Council approved the *Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields (domains) of study for the Master degrees*⁵³. This document was necessary because this type of evaluation is a complex one and ARACIS and the Higher Education Institution needed a guideline that provides detailed steps and information related to the periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees.

For this Guideline, ARACIS did not send yet a SCR because the document was approved only recently, it shall be fully applied in 2018 and the Agency considers that it is important to refer to this new procedure in the present SAR.

2. Review panel noted that ARACIS applied criteria from professional or statutory bodies in certain domains, but that these were not sufficiently transparent in ARACIS' public documentation.

The Register Committee noted ARACIS' statement in its comments to the review report that these criteria were now published or referred to explicitly in its document. This could, however, not be verified since

⁵² Specific Procedure for the External Periodic Evaluation of Accredited Master Study domains (in Romanian): http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/OM_nr_146_din_2014.pdf

⁵³ http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_Proceduri/2017/Guideline_for_periodic_external_evaluation_of_the_fields_of_study_for_the_Master_degrees.pdf



the corresponding documents are in Romanian. This issue is therefore to be considered in the next external review of ARACIS. (ESG 2.3 - ESG 2005 version)

ARACIS understands the importance of the transparency of its decisions and of its criteria, too. In this sense, as ARACIS underlined in the previous Self-Evaluation Report, all criteria, procedures, guidelines are published on ARACIS website.

Indeed, most of these documents are published in Romanian, but compared to the last review ARACIS managed to translate the most important documents and published the translations on its website. Clarifications of this aspect are presented at ENQA Recommendation No. 6 (as per this SAR).

3. When ARACIS was initially admitted to the Register, the further development of its criteria and processes, and their fitness for the declared purpose of supporting quality enhancement, was flagged. The Register Committee noted that the review panel commended ARACIS at various places on its efforts to continuously optimise its processes and criteria towards supporting quality enhancement. (ESG 2.4 - ESG 2005 version)

As the review panel noted at the previous review, ARACIS made progress regarding to the development of its criteria and processes and their fitness for the declared purpose of supporting quality enhancement.

As the Agency specified in the Self Evaluation Report 2013 “the processes and activities are differentiated in order to best fit their purposes. The **Methodology** in use (**comment:** the proposal for the revised **Methodology**, was approved by the Romanian Government and became official in January 2018), is fitted for purpose accordingly, keeping into account the differences between the types of evaluations”. Also, the ARACIS evaluation activities, as described at Section 5 and 6 of the present SAR contain different steps according to different types of activities.

4. The former standard 3.7 required that external assessment is carried out by “a group of experts”, which is understood to include the drafting and agreement on the report.

When ARACIS was initially admitted to the Register, **it was flagged for attention whether its report drafting procedures involve the expert panels and prevent undue influence on their conclusions.** The Register Committee considered the review report and sought and received further clarification by the chair of the review panel. The **Register Committee** concluded that, as far as program evaluations are concerned, **the role and involvement of the expert panels in drafting evaluation reports was now clear and appropriate.**

For **institutional evaluations**, however, it did not become clear how the experts are involved in drafting and agreeing upon the main evaluation report, which serves as a basis for decision making by the ARACIS Council, and whether the main report is agreed upon by the entire expert group. **This matter has therefore been flagged.**

The Register Committee noted that ARACIS **does not yet involve students in all program evaluation expert panels.**

The Register Committee took note of the additional information provided by ARACIS on its ongoing efforts to recruit student experts for program evaluations in cooperation with the Romanian national unions of students.

The Committee further considered that ARACIS has decided to formalize the participation of students in its Permanent Specialty Commissions, which are involved in program evaluations.

While the Committee welcomed the measures ARACIS has already taken, students should in principle be involved in all program evaluation expert panels. **This matter has therefore been flagged. (ESG 3.7 - ESG 2005 version)**

In conclusion, the following issues have been flagged for particular attention:



ESG 3.7: Role of expert group in agreeing reports

For institutional evaluations, it should receive explicit attention whether the entire expert panel is involved in drafting and agreeing upon the main evaluation report.

The ENQA review panel made the same recommendation and ARACIS took into consideration this aspect by starting to use, from 2014, the “Synthetic Report” of institutional evaluations which includes the aspect that the entire expert panel is involved in drafting and agreeing upon the main evaluation report

ESG 3.7: Involvement of students in program reviews

It should receive attention whether ARACIS has further developed the participation of students in the expert groups for program reviews.

The involvement of students in the works of the Permanent Specialty Commissions was fully implemented in January 2017; the selection followed „The Procedure of selection and nomination of the students in the Permanent Specialty Commissions”.

For the recruitment of students in the National Register of Evaluators – Students, there were made important steps; at present, ARACIS, in cooperation with the Romanian Students Federations, completed this Register which contains 203 students from different study domains and from different study cycles.

Regarding the involvement of students in program reviews, as it is described in ENQA recommendation no. 1 above, “the legal basis for the involvement of students as evaluators for program evaluations is included in the new **Methodology** sent for approval by Government Decision (November 2017), which would also solve the problem of covering additional costs.

Until the approval of the new **Methodology**, ARACIS tried and managed to implement this recommendation - ARACIS Council approved a Decision in September 2017 for the inclusion of students in the review panels of programs evaluations. For instance, the first panels including a student member evaluated, in October – November 2017, first cycle study programs. ARACIS is still developing planning procedures to evaluate, in one mission, “clusters” (two or more study programs from a given domain) at the same university. Thus, one student evaluator could participate in the panel together with the other academic members’.

13. SWOT analysis and ARACIS priorities

The SWOT self-analysis and other external analyzes, such as those performed in the framework of the EU funded projects mentioned in the SAR, take into account the influence on the fulfilment of agency mission of the quality of the internal quality assurance in the context of the external environment. Consequently, strengths and weaknesses were identified, characterizing both types of influencing factors. Their understanding should enable the agency to valorize the strengths in correlation with the existing opportunities as well as to identify and take measures to eliminate or mitigate the weaknesses. At the same time, the analysis should allow the agency to avoid many threats or help it to deal with some that appear to be to some extent inevitable.

Strengths:

- ARACIS has met the requirements of ESG, to obtain ENQA full-member status and registration of ARACIS in EQAR;
- National and international recognition of ARACIS, as a member of INQAAHE, CEENQA, ENAEE;
- Clear definition, by law, of ARACIS scope and objectives, independence and self-financing;



- ARACIS remains in permanent connection to the realities of the academic world and is open to receive proposals for improving standards and procedures from universities and other stakeholders;
- The decision making is based on evidence; ARACIS collects systemic data on stakeholder's opinions and quality perceptions, to allow for a more consistent benchmarking exercise in the future, to permanently improve the Methodology and procedures, to keep the pace with the dynamics of quality assurance, in the context of a changing social and economic environment;
- Development and approval, over the past two years, of new specific standards for the Permanent Specialty Commissions, based on a broad consultation of universities, employers and student associations, in correlation with international trends in quality assurance in higher education <http://www.aracis.ro/proceduri/>;
- Clarity, consistency and transparency of the evaluation procedures, in line with ESGs, applied to both state and private universities;
- Maintaining and enhancing the positive image of the agency at national, regional and international level; the presence and active participation of international experts in external institutional evaluations opens new perspectives to evaluate quality, especially in terms of the institutional mission, resources and management;
- Contributing to the development of a "culture of quality" in universities, by underlying and strengthening the role of internal quality assurance systems;
- Practicing the follow-up process, which allows more rapid addressing recommendations made in the evaluations;
- Quality of human resource: Selection of ARACIS members, as well as of the experts from the Permanent Specialty Commissions and permanent staff; high interest of evaluators to take part at ARACIS frequent training sessions - the National Register of Evaluators (RNE) includes over 1000 academics;
- Enhanced involvement of students in the evaluation process based on good collaboration with student organizations; all Permanent Specialty Commissions have in their structure a student evaluator, who is involved also in study programs evaluations; active participation of students in external institutional evaluations, which encourage students to trust in quality assurance and take an active part in the process; the independent and objective evaluation performed by the student members from the visit panels, Permanent Specialty Commissions and other working groups contribute to the quality of reporting and final decisions taking;
- Employers involvement in the institutional evaluation process, as well as through their representation in the Council, is an important advantage in increasing the credibility of evaluations and decisions;
- Adequate management of the complex and numerous external evaluation activities in Romanian higher education. The organizational chart is adapted to ARACIS mission(s);
- Recent provision of better workspace and material endowment, to stimulate performance and ensure the proper functioning of the Agency;
- Participation and involvement in projects with European funding, both as beneficiary and partner, supports permanent development of new procedures, staff training, acquisition of new equipment.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses are identified to allow adoption of corrective and developmental measures;

- Un-equal participation and commitment of Council members in activities aiming the improvement of the external quality evaluation process, such as the elaboration of procedures, norms, methodologies etc. and in the activities of the specialty commissions they are responsible for;



- Deficiencies in the coverage with evaluators of some areas, due to their limited number (although, overall, the number of evaluators is impressive);
- Difficulty to involve students in all the external quality evaluation processes, especially due to the large number of study programs to be visited;
- Difficulty to involve employers in the external quality evaluation processes;
- Delays in updating the **Methodology** and Guide, largely due to the context and institutional collaboration with the decision makers in the field of higher education;
- Existence of some cases (isolated) where the evaluators activity is superficial or with many contradictory elements, despite a seemingly rigor;
- Faulty communication (sometimes) between ARACIS internal departments; in this regard, measures have been taken to improve the Organizational Chart and temporarily cover some leading positions;
- Website insufficiently developed;
- Elaboration, updating and implementation of some internal procedures was slow, done with a certain delay, due to lack of specialized staff.

Opportunities

- The existence of a favourable international environment for the quality assurance agencies in the EHEA to participate jointly at European-funded projects, to enhance collaboration and to exchange information on best practice.
- ARACIS, as ENQA full-member and EQAR – registered agency, receives requests from universities to participate in external study programs and/or institutional evaluations or to contribute with its expert evaluators to quality evaluation missions.
- Measures proposed to improve the national legislative framework and the **Methodology**, should stimulate cooperation with a labour market open to helping HEIs to increase the professional quality of higher education graduates.
- Openness of the national higher education system, of the National Council of Rectors and HEIs towards continuous quality improvement in the education and professional formation process.

Threats

A. Threats coming from structural and functional particular elements of the higher education system, which may affect ARACIS activity of making accurate external evaluations on quality assurance.

For this reason, the Agency is highly committed in identifying methods and implementing measures to reduce and/or eliminate the potential effects of these threats (see also Section 14).

The ARACIS “Quality Barometers” underlined a rather low level of differentiation between universities in terms of quality assurance missions, strategies and procedures. Also, non-surprisingly, significant inertia to accept change was identified, including the area of evaluation of master domains or doctoral schools. Universities with diversified structures may have however different reactions to change in relation to the “specialized”, profession-oriented universities.

Maintaining a formalistic behaviour in internal quality assurance practices, limiting those to the preparation of accreditation and/or periodic evaluation files, can be a real threat. Further, the quality assurance practices have not been fully internalized, a rupture between the teaching/learning process and the current research activities in universities being noted in many situations.



Taking into account only the scientific research results in the promotion process of the academic staff is already a real threat for the quality of the teaching/learning process in universities. The educational/professional formation activity, which is in fact the main mission of higher education, is at risk of being replaced by the exclusive concern for obtaining internationally recognized research results and therefore for the formation of future researchers. In this sense, the difference between quality assurance and university rankings is not reflected in the media and it is not always understood even in the HEIs.

Students involvement in the external evaluation carried out by ARACIS is one of the advantages of the external evaluation activity, but in terms of involving students in internal quality assurance, at the level of education providers, a relatively low contribution was noted.

Another threat emerging from the education system functioning is a poor culture of quality at the level of education providers. The quality assurance is still seen as a bureaucratic activity and not as a way to ensure the correspondence between the dynamism noted on the labour market and the equally dynamic offer in the field of teaching/learning/evaluation process. The above-mentioned emphasis on the research activity in universities tends to create a culture of elites in research and a counter culture in the formation process of specialists demanded by the market. Under such circumstances, there may be a diversion of quality assurance activity in the education process and a decrease in the effectiveness of its internal systems of quality assurance.

B. Other threats

Synthetically, other types of threats are represented by:

- Inadequate or hasty legislative changes may destabilize the external quality evaluation procedures and methodology, including ARACIS functioning.

- Danger of capping the internal quality assurance activity in universities, and hence a faulty and inappropriate response to the requests of any external evaluation agency.

- Insufficient funding for education providers, by reducing the budget funds and the number of fee paying students (especially in private education), diminishing the funds earmarked for institutional development and research etc.

- Low salaries of academics and staff.

- Decrease of the managerial capacity of university leadership and “crisis at entrance/admission” for some universities, due to the lack of interested candidates, especially in hard sciences and professionally oriented studies.

- Increasing competition between the quality assurance agencies, listed in EQAR, on the Romanian market, which is lacking legal transparency procedures.

A recent comprehensive **analysis** of feedback received from stakeholders can be found at:

[http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/2017/Prezentare_EN/2017_Review -
_Evaluation of the quality of the activity of ARACIS.pdf](http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/2017/Prezentare_EN/2017_Review_-_Evaluation_of_the_quality_of_the_activity_of_ARACIS.pdf)

Another summary SWOT type **perspective of employers** on ARACIS activity is included in Section 11, which reflects also the results of the project QUALITAS.



14. Current challenges and areas for future development/assumed deadlines

Improving the quality level of ARACIS activities remains a permanent target, although positive changes have already been achieved. In correlation with the SWOT analysis, the agency has set a list of priorities for 2017-2022. This section is correlated with Section 13.

1. Implementation of improved QA Criteria, standards and performance indicators, as approved by national new regulations (Law, Government Decision). Development of quality culture in HEI should allow the external evaluation to focus mostly on processes of internal quality assurance and output/outcome criteria and performance indicators, as per ESG Part 1, rather than on input criteria. ARACIS has already made proposals of new performance indicators which, for periodical (cyclical) evaluation are mostly focused on the external evaluation (“audit”) of the HEIs internal quality system (process) and quality enhancement. **Approval of Methodology by Government Decision: December 2017 - became effective after its publication in the Romanian Official Gazette no. 25/11.01.2018. An Overview of approved changes under Standards from Part 2 of ESG is presented in Annex 10. Gradual implementation shall start in February 2018, according to planning approved by the Council. First partial completion of the Guide: estimated in February 2018. Substantial Change Report to be submitted to EQAR together with ENQA – coordinated Review Report in September 2018.**

2. Further development of specific quality standards, with increased contribution of stakeholders. Standards should become more closely related to the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (RNCIS). To this end, ARACIS should also act, together with the national authority (Ministry of Labour and Social Justice) to up-date the list of Classification of Occupations in Romania (COR), in correlation with the new economic landscape of employability of HE graduates. **Development of a “Strategy”, to significantly enhance participation of the stakeholders in ARACIS activities: March 2018. Development of specific standards more closely related with RNCIS. Contribution at up-dating of COR: June 2018.**

3. Making the provisions set for ARACIS in the project “Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating quality standards QAFIN” a reality, aiming to the achievement and implementation of evidence-based public policies, in the field of financing of higher education institutions, through the enhancement of regulations regarding external quality assurance and ranking in higher education. Also, the project aims at the improvement of administrative capacity of the Ministry of National Education and of ARACIS, by adapting structures, optimizing processes and training human resources, and enhancing the use of transparent public consultation mechanisms that ensure citizen participation in decision-making and by applying European best practices. The project is coordinated by the Ministry of National Education – The Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects and co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) through the Operational Program "Administrative Capacity" 2014-2020. The implementation period of the project is of 36 months, between May 2017 and May 2020. The activities will be implemented with technical assistance from the World Bank experts. The expected main results of the project are: a study on data and good practices at European level regarding quality assurance and classification in higher education, as well as on the impact of current practices, at national level; improved methodologies and guidelines for external quality assurance and ranking of universities and study programs; updated internal regulations and procedures for ARACIS; trained staff of the Ministry of National Education and its subordinated councils, of ARACIS and higher education institutions regarding the implementation of the developed methodologies, as well as participation of staff from ARACIS and from the Ministry of National Education in exchanges of good practices with other higher education quality assurance agencies listed in EQAR. Information on the project can be accessed at the following links: ARACIS Info: <http://www.aracis.ro/en/projects/qafin/>; ENQA Newsletter, September 2017: <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/aracis-works-to-improve-public-policies-and-to-enhance-the-quality-of-regulations/>.



ARACIS has nominated a working group from its own staff. Implementation of first project results: 2019.

4. ARACIS shall continue to work on and gradually implement an improved a “Benchmarking process”, based on the results of previous projects and on the QAFIN project, starting from the current performance of Romanian universities, as a quality enhancement tool. With the help of improved IT technology and software, HEIs shall be asked, according to the ARACIS standards and performance indicators, to gather systematically and make public data on their IQA and performance and to set internal additional reference performance indicators. Follow-up of external evaluation shall concentrate on permanent enhancement of IQA. Universities will be encouraged to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses and to take remedial decisions on the basis of evidence. ARACIS will improve the follow-up process by increasing the number of visits to monitor how higher education institutions improve the services they offer and address the issues raised during the external evaluation visits. All the institutions/study programs that have received judgments of “Lack of confidence”/“No confidence” or “Limited degree of confidence”/“Limited confidence”, as well as those that have received judgments of “Confidence” or “High degree of confidence”, following the evaluation, shall be considered. **Approval of Government Decision: estimated in December 2017. First completion of the Guide: estimated in February 2018. Implementation of first improved follow-up procedures: starting after completion of the Guide – estimated March 2018. Final results of the project QAFIN: May 2020.**

5. Another important element refers on implementation of the standards and performance indicators used in the external evaluation of the master domains. These standards have been finalized, recently a training session has been performed with representatives of higher education institutions and members of the Permanent Specialty Commissions. The implementation process will start with the following year and, if necessary, some of the standards or indicators will be adjusted and/or improved. **Implementing to start in January 2018.**

6. Special attention shall be given by ARACIS to the development and completion of the evaluation methodology for doctoral schools, according to the legislation in the field. In this respect, several discussions took place within the National Council of Rectors and the first draft of the performance standards and indicators was presented at this meeting in November 2017. After finalizing them and approving the specific methodology, the external evaluation of all doctoral schools in higher education will be carried out. In parallel, the Evaluators Register for this new type of evaluation will be finalized. **The deadline for evaluation is set at the end of 2019.**

7. Continuous improvement of communication with HEIs is another fundamental priority of ARACIS activity. The real quality assurance and its promotion through the interaction of ARACIS - universities is based on strengthening the relationship of trust, partnership between evaluator and evaluated entity. In this respect, the training sessions for evaluators, internal and external, will continue to address, in addition to the technical aspects, the ethical aspects, the behaviour of the visiting teams in the evaluation process. **Permanent activities.**

8. Improving reporting procedures remains a priority of ARACIS. ARACIS is one of the partner QA agencies in the project „The Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR)”⁵⁴, coordinated by EQAR. The project was selected for EU co-funding under Erasmus+ Key Action 3 – European Forward-Looking Cooperation Projects. The project partners include a number of EQAR-registered QA agencies, the key European stakeholder organisations (including ENQA), and a research partner. The Database will allow users to identify whether a higher education institution has been subject to external quality assurance in line with the ESG, by an EQAR-registered agency (at institutional level, or one or more of its programs) and to easily access the corresponding quality assurance report(s). **Improving reporting on the website: a working group has been nominated in 2017; by April 2018 the project of a new website is to be finalized. Estimated implementation date: September 2018.**

⁵⁴ <https://www.eqar.eu/topics/deqar.html>



9. ARACIS is well aware of the need to **eliminate deficiencies in the functioning of its internal mechanisms** and therefore will adopt a set of complex measures to ensure a higher level of functioning in terms of all directions, departments, services and offices in its structure. The new organizational chart, which provides a new position as General Director, will ensure a more coherent functioning of ARACIS Technical Department, reducing the chances of multiplying fragmentation in internal communication or document circuits. A proper functioning of the internal quality assurance mechanism and hiring of some internal auditors will allow the achievement of a higher performance at the agency level. **Permanent activity.**

10. To **enhance better application of gender equality criteria**, ARACIS signed in 2017, as partner, the Grant Agreement for the EU Horizon 2020 funded project “Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation — TARGET”, project coordinated by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) - Austria, that will be implemented for a 48 months period. ARACIS is one of the partner institutions. TARGET Project will initiate institutional change in seven gender equality innovating institutions (GEIs) in the Mediterranean basin – including research performing organizations (RPOs), research funding organizations (RFOs) and a network of universities. TARGET takes a reflexive approach which goes beyond the formal adoption of a gender equality plan by emphasizing an iterative reflection of progress made as well as establishing a community of practice to effect institutional transformation. **The deadline of the project is 2021. Implementing of first results to start in 2020.**

11. In the perspective of undertaking by higher education institutions of professional training by offering tertiary non-university study programs in Romania, which will be externally evaluated; the agency hopes to be in a privileged position from the point of view of experience gained by participation in the project. “*The Automated Quality Control System (AQUA-TS)*”(see also Section 8). **Expected initiation of this type of activity: probably not before 2020.**

12. Addressing weaknesses and threats. Addressing identified weaknesses and threats is a **permanent activity** of the agency. The Executive Board identifies and makes proposals for measures to be taken, which are then approved by the Council and implemented.

In conclusion, we believe that ARACIS, better structured and functional, under the conditions of a higher education system in which universities are aware of their public mission and responsibility, can accelerate the process of raising the quality level in higher education institutions in Romania. An important chance of their affirmation in EHEA will enable them to contribute to brain-drain reduction and become poles of attraction for students in the European Higher Education Area, especially from neighbouring eastern European countries, or from Central Asia and Middle East, as the number of foreign language programs increases. In this approach, ARACIS can be considered a real partner.

The agency shall consider as a priority the recommendations resulting from this ENQA coordinated review and take adequate measures to address them.

We believe that our vision for quality of higher education should remain focused on helping *building better HE institutions*, able to give students and all stakeholders what they expect in terms of quality of education.

Glossary of Terms

The first Glossary of terms was drafted as soon as 2004. After ARACIS started to operate, the Glossary was completed and revised in 2007 and can be accessed at

<http://www.aracis.ro/en/publications/aracis-publications/>



or directly at

http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/Publicatii_ARACIS/Engleza/Glossary_07_05_2007.pdf.

In addition:

In Section 2 of the SAR, **Development of the self-assessment report (SAR)**, particular details are given, under the sub-title **Terminology**.

Explanation of the concept of Master study domain (field): The accredited Master domains (fields of study for the Master degrees) were created starting with the 2013-2014 academic year. The accredited Master domains (fields of study) and Master study programs, respectively the geographic locations, the number of ECTS for each study program depending on the form of studies, as well as the maximum number of students who can be enrolled in each academic year in higher education institutions is decided annually by Government Decision. For the academic year 2017-2018, these aspects are included in the Government Decision 117/2017⁵⁵.

Also, according to the Government Decision 404/2006⁵⁶ regarding the organization and conduct of Master's degree studies, the Master domains (fields of study) for which an institution can organize Master studies are the Bachelor domains as well as other domains decided upon by Ministerial Order, at the proposal of ARACIS.

List of Annexes

Annex 1 - Romanian Legislative framework on Quality Assurance in Education

Annex 1.1 - Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved by the Law nr. 87/2006, with subsequent amendments and completions – referred in the SAR as the “Law”

Annex 1.2 - Law of National Education no. 1/2011, with subsequent amendments and completions (includes other legal provisions on quality assurance and ARACIS activity)

Annex 2 - The Methodology and Quality evaluation activities guide of ARACIS

Annex 2.1 - Methodology for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference, and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (referred in the SAR as the “Methodology”) – link webpage ARACIS

Annex 2.2 - Quality evaluation activities guide for university study programs and for higher education institutions (ARACIS Guide; six Parts – in Romanian with subsequent modifications i.e., for study programs) - link webpage ARACIS

Annex 3 - Evaluations carried out by ARACIS during 01.01.2014 - 30.10.2017

Annex 4 - ARACIS Internal Quality Assurance

Annex 4.1 - ARACIS Code of ethics and Rules of conduct

Annex 4.2 - Contract with external evaluators (excerpt)

Annex 4.3 - List of ARACIS internal quality assurance procedures

⁵⁵ <https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere%20articole/HG%20117-2017.pdf> (in Romanian)

⁵⁶ http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/HG_masterat.pdf (in Romanian)



Annex 5 - Organisation chart of ARACIS (up to 27.11.2017)

Annex 6 - Thematic analyses

Annex 6.1 - Perception of the policies and quality of Romanian higher education at the system level

Annex 6.2 - Opinion of the higher education institutions on the quality of ARACIS activities carried out in the external evaluation process

Annex 7 - Selection and nomination of Evaluators; Overview of training sessions

Annex 7.1 - Selection of the academics - members of the Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions

Annex 7.2 - Selection of the students – members of the Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions

Annex 7.3 - Overview of Criteria/Sequencing of the nomination of academic experts for external evaluation missions

Annex 7.4 - Nomination of foreign (international) experts for evaluation missions at institutional level

Annex 7.5 - Selection of students in RNE and nomination of students in panels

Annex 7.6 – Training of ARACIS own staff

Annex 7.7 – Training of academic and student evaluators

Annex 8 - EUR-ACE Label evaluation and awarding: compliance with ESG Part 1

Annex 9 - Documents: ENQA and EQAR Recommendations and follow-up

Annex 9.1 - ENQA documents - link webpage ARACIS

Last ENQA coordinated external review report (2013)

ENQA Board letter to the agency after the last review (28.10.2013)

Mid-term progress report by the agency (30.09.2015)

Clarification request from ENQA regarding the Progress report (20.11.2015)

ARACIS response to the clarification request (27.01.2016)

Annex 9.2 - EQAR documents - link webpage ARACIS

EQAR letter to the agency (22.05.2014)

Substantive Changes Report (03.03.2016)

Clarification request from EQAR regarding the Substantive Changes Report (18.05.2016)

ARACIS response to the clarification request (06.06.2016)

Letter from EQAR regarding the Substantive Changes Report (05.09.2016)

Annex 9.3 - Comparative analysis of judgments of previous ENQA coordinated reviews (2009, 2013)

Annex 10 - Overview of approved changes under Standards from Part 2 of ESG