



03.03.2016

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES REPORT

- A. In the Approval of the Application by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) for “Renewal of Inclusion in the Register”, the Register Committee in its Analysis under point 6 ESG 2.2 underlined that ARACIS will be expected to make a Substantive Changes Report (SCR) once the new **methodology for accreditation and evaluation of master domains has been finalized and is being rolled out.**

The roll out of the new methodology for evaluation the Master Study domains is a long term process, which has just began. The roll out of the Specific Procedure is in its initial phase and full implementation is scheduled to be finalized in 2018. However, meeting the requirement expressed by the Register Committee is a priority for ARACIS and cannot be postponed. Therefore, this Report is “Preliminary”, a first step towards a more elaborate version which shall include further improvement based on empirical information available after the entire procedure will effectively start, on the lessons learned in the process and implementation of the new ESG. Therefore, ARACIS kindly asks the Register Committee to consider this document as the first part of the final SCR. We consider this approach is in line with by the answer ARACIS gave in the EQAR call for information in 2014, according to which “ EQAR asks all registered agencies to provide an annual update on the number of external quality assurance reviews completed In addition, we also invite you to review the general description of your agency, as presented on the EQAR web-site, and to check whether your agency has undergone any substantive changes that should be reported”.

The information which is included in the SCR shall also be included in the next application for “Renewal of inclusion in the Register” in 2018.

Preamble

The Specific Procedure for the External Periodic Evaluation of Accredited Master Study domains (in the following parts of the document shall be referred to as the “Specific Procedure” or (SP)) was approved in 2014 by Ministerial Order, Published in the Official Gazette, Part I nr.236/2014: http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/OM_nr_146_din_2014.pdf

This Specific Procedure aims to give universities more autonomy and flexibility in developing new Master Study programs, better adapted in relation with the labor market, internationalization and further research fields. The new methodology does not replace or modify the existing ARACIS methodology for external evaluation of Master Study programs. Accreditation of Master Study domains contributes to the reduction of what universities considered heavy bureaucratic load in drafting Self Evaluation Reports, especially for Master Study programs which were already accredited, belong to the same Master Study domain (i.e. Law, History, Mechanical Engineering etc.) but have to be externally reviewed again every five years. For accredited domains, the new Specific Procedure follows the same principle as the one ARACIS has successfully run over the year for institutional evaluations (audits) of accredited universities, in which a number of min. 20% of the university accredited Study programs are also externally evaluated. In this respect, the cyclical external evaluation of a Master Study domain includes evaluation of approx. 30% of Master Study programs offered within the domain.



The detailed ARACIS Procedure, following the approval of the Specific Procedure, was approved by ARACIS Council to make operational the provisions of the Specific Procedure approved by Ministerial Order. This document was published on the ARACIS webpage http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Comunicate_Media/2014/Proceduri_privind_evaluarea_domeniilor_de_master_08.04.2014_-_FINAL.pdf (in Romanian) and presented to all Rectors with the Occasion of the Rectors Conference Meeting in 2014, before the procedure was due to be applied.

The Specific Procedure and the detailed ARACIS Procedure are one of the topics of the four training sessions to be organized by ARACIS under the framework of the Project QUALITAS - Contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894 financed from European Funds and from ARACIS contribution. The training sessions are already scheduled and organized for March, April and May 2015. The first session is dedicated to approx. 70 students, the other three sessions to ARACIS evaluators, internal evaluators from the internal quality assurance structures of the universities, academics and other staff, according to the case, for a total number of approx. 270 persons.

Outline of the Specific Procedure approved by Ministerial Order Published in the Official Gazette, Part I nr.236/2014.

Art1. In the academic year 2013-2014 the accredited Master Study domains are established by the aggregation of the Master Study programs previously accredited by ARACIS before June 30, 2013, according the Government Decision nr.369/2013 for the approval of the Methodology regarding accreditation of Master Study domains on the basis of the accredited master study programs.

EXPLANATION: each of the Master Study programs included in one Master Study domain belong to the same common scientific/educational field.

Art.2 Any Master Study program which has not been subject to an external periodical evaluation within 5 years from the date when it was accredited shall be evaluated externally with the occasion of the external evaluation of the master Studies domain.

Art.3. Art.4 and Art.5 *EXPLANATION:* These articles are very detailed, including the multi-year planning of the external evaluation of the Master Study programs mentioned at Art.1. The planning described at Art.3 is based on a statistical analysis of the situation of all Master Study programs from each particular university. Art.4 and Art.5 specifies that the year in which a Master Study domain is externally evaluated is the same for each Study programs to be evaluated in the same given domain. Art.5 specifies the conditions under which universities can offer already accredited Master Study programs until the external evaluation of the Master Study domain becomes effective.

Art.6 *COMMENT:* this final article describes the obligation of ARACIS to inform universities about the dates at which the Specific procedure for Master Study domains shall start, for each individual university.

Outline of the (detailed) ARACIS Procedure on the accreditation/external periodic evaluation of Master Studies domains

Due to the large number of Master Study programs in several Master Study domains as well as to the significant differences between the universities and the state of external evaluation of their Master Study programs, the ARACIS procedure has been defined and it shall be applied, according to the case, in the form of three individual (sub-) procedures:

- I. Procedure for external periodic evaluation of the Master Studies domains

COMMENT: it did not begin yet, with the exception of the fulfillment of ARACIS obligation to inform universities about the dates at which the Specific procedure for Master Study domains shall start, for each individual university

- II. Procedure for external evaluation for accreditation of a new Master Study domain



COMMENT: a **new** Master Study domain is defined as a domain in which the university does not have any accredited Master Study program.

III. Procedure for inclusion of a new Master Study domain in an accredited Master Study domain.

COMMENT: (sub) procedures II and III are the only type of activity for evaluation of Master Study domains ARACIS has run in 2014 and, for 158 full time accredited study programs and 2 part-time study programs, based on the existing methodology for external evaluation of Master Study programs. In 2015 the procedure was applied for 123 Master Study programs.

These individual (sub-) procedures are briefly described below.

I. Procedure for external periodic evaluation of the Master Studies domains

According the current legislation, each Master Study domain should be externally evaluated every 5 years aiming to confirm accreditation, based on the performance of the accredited Master Studies programs in the domain and of the institutional capacity of the University, as an “institution “empowered” (by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research) to organize university Master studies – (acronym in Romanian: IOSUM)”. On the basis of its own the evaluation, ARACIS is empowered to propose the Ministry of Education and Research either to maintain the “accredited status” for the domain and of the study programs included in the domain at the date at which the evaluation was initiated or to withdraw the “accredited status”. The evaluation takes into account a number of quality indicators which prove the capacity of the Master Study domain to run Master Study programs, such as resources (academic staff, facilities), type of studies (curricula, full time, part time), teaching language, research interests with students involvement etc. The correlation with the number of students for which the conditions to run the Master Study programs are considered to be adequate is one important output of the ARACIS evaluation. The periodic (cyclic, every 5 years) external evaluation of a Master Study domain shall include evaluation of approx. 30% of Master Studies programs within the domain.

Universities must draft one Self Evaluation Report (SER) for the Master Study domain together with SERs for each Master Study program which has been selected to be part of the evaluation. The selection procedure is based on several criteria and is performed in consultation with the university.

The team of experts for the site visit shall include 2-4 members and one Master or Doctoral student registered in a Study program which belongs to the same Master Study domain. All the members of the team sign the documents, including the report. After discussion and validation in the ARACIS Council the report of the Council is forwarded to the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research to be included in the Government Decision and in the National register of Qualifications in Higher Education.

Further improvement of the procedure is still in progress and shall be included in the final SCR.



II. Procedure for external evaluation for accreditation of a new Master Study domain

Higher education institutions intending to organize Master Study programs in a “new” domain must apply and obtain first the accreditation of the Master Study domain. Accreditation of new Master Study domain can be obtained by accreditation of external evaluation of at least one Study program in the domain, which is performed following the existing ARACIS procedure. In 2015 were accredited 22 additional Master Study domains.

III. Procedure for inclusion of a new Master Study program in an accredited Master Study domain

This procedure is meant to give the university more flexibility to revisit or diversify the offer of Master Study programs in the Master Study domains previously accredited in the university. However, this exercise does not allow for registration of more students in a domain for which the capacity to run Master Study programs was approved in the process of accreditation.

According to this procedure, following approval in the University Senate, the university drafts a *Dossier* for including a Master Study program in one of its accredited Master Study domains and applies for the external evaluation. In the *Dossier* all the requirements related to resources and curricula etc. are presented for the Master Study program in conjunction with an analysis of the correlation of the learning outcomes with labor market needs. The Specialty Permanent Committee of ARACIS competent to judge upon the *Dossier* makes an analysis and makes an informed proposal to include or not the Master Study program in the domain.

B. According to the provisions of the Emergency Government Ordinance Nr. 94/2014 published in the Official Gazette, Part I, Nr. 968/30.12.1994 the number of Council members has been modified to 21, out of which 17 academics, 2 student representatives, 1 representative of the employers and 1 representative of the trade unions in Higher Education. The ARACIS selection procedure to fill in the vacant positions for academics representatives has started in 2014, continued in January and February 2015 with international participation in the Selection Committee of 1 representative of ENQA Board and 1 representative of ESU Board. After the completion of the selection procedure the ARACIS Council continues its activity in the new format starting from March 2015.