Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Activity Report

Year 2019

www.aracis.ro

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ARACIS

Member of:

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ENQA

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
ENAEE

Registered in:

European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQAR

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS (in alphabetical order)

A	Accreditation
AADR	Romanian Digital Agenda Agency
ACAD-INOV	Project acronym (RO) - Virtual community for quality assurance and improvement of strategic and innovative management in technical and composite universities to increase the relevance of higher education for the labour market
ANACEC	Republic of Moldova's National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research
ANC	National Qualifications Agency
ANOSR	National Alliance of Students' Organisations in Romania
AP	Provisional authorizing to operate
ARACIP	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
ARACIS	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
AUF	(FR) Agence universitaire de la Francophonie
BEx	Executive Board of the ARACIS Council
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
CE	Ethics Commission
CM	Monitoring Commission
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CNATDCU	National Council for Certification of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates
CNRED	National Center for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas
DEQAR	Project acronym (EN) - Database of External Quality Assurance Reports
DRIPC	Direction of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation
EACEA	Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENAEE	European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EP	Periodic evaluation
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESQA	Project acronym (EN) - Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities
ESU	European Students' Union
ETER	European Tertiary Education Register
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
FEN	External Non-reimbursable Funds
FSE	European Social Fund
GD	Decision of the Government of Romania
GEO	Emergency Ordinance of the Government of Romania
GO	Romanian Government's Ordinance
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
LC	EUR-ACE Label Comittee
LEN	National Education Law
MEC	Ministry of Education and Research

MECS	Ministry of Education and Scientific Research
MoNE	Ministry of National Education
M. Of.	Official Gazette of Romania
OSGG	Order of the Government's General Secretariat
QAFIN	Project acronym (RO) - Improvement of public policies in higher education and better-quality regulations through updated quality standards
QAN	Quality Audit Network
QAR	Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education
QUALITAS	Project acronym (RO) - Development and strengthening of a quality culture in the Romanian higher education system
PCUe	Electronic Single Checkpoint
RNE	ARACIS National Register of Evaluators
RNE-S	ARACIS National Register of Evaluators - Students
ROF	Organisational and Operational Regulations
SCAP	Public Administration Strengthening Strategy
SCIM	Managerial internal control system
TARGET	Project acronym (EN) - Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation
UCAAPI	Central Harmonisation Unit for Public Internal Audit
UEFISCDI	Executive Unit for Funding in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation
UNSR	National Students' Union of Romania
USR	Romanian Students' Union

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

The 2019 Activity Report of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) is completed in the first part of the subsequent calendar year, as usual, to provide a full picture of the activities performed during the reporting year. Before I briefly tackle on these activities, I take permission to point to the special, dramatic times that the entire planet is going through at the beginning of 2020, caused by the unexpected pandemic that has affected virtually the entire human race with flashing speed.

Therefore, in 2020, some of the procedures of the Agency are already affected by the legal measures implemented to protect the population, among which social distancing measures and the restrictions on people's movement create multiple effects. In this respect, temporary measures have already been taken, while waiting for the moment when things are going to settle back into a normality that will probably be slightly different from the one we were used to.

Concerning year 2019, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education continued to carry out its mission and responsibilities, in line with the provisions of the laws in force on quality assurance in the Romanian higher education system. The Report presents the activities performed by the Agency in carrying out its mission, along the activities conducted in the Agency's capacity as a member of significant international organisations, registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), and a partner in several projects implemented with national and international funds.

Out of the 11 institutional evaluations in public and private higher education institutions, for which the reports were completed in 2019, five were completed with "High degree of confidence" judgments, three with "Confidence" judgments, two with "Limited degree of confidence" judgments, and one university received a "Lack of confidence" judgment. The report gives a detailed presentation of the evaluations of Bachelor's and Master's programmes, and of the evaluations of Master study domains. At the same time, the results of the evaluations of Bachelor's and Master's programmes have largely confirmed an improvement in quality.

ARACIS continued the preparatory work in 2019 to initiate evaluation of the third cycle of higher education studies - doctoral programmes; more information on this is given further in the report.

The students' engagement in the activity of Permanent Speciality Expert Commissions, their participation in the external evaluation visits for the evaluation of study programmes, Master's programmes, and institutional evaluation was permanent. To supplement and update the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators - Students, ARACIS supported the students' federations in organising and delivering the training sessions.

ARACIS continued to issue publications on the higher education and the external evaluation of the quality of education in 2019 as well.

Five papers were published in 2019 in print and in electronic form, due for release in January 2020, in the *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR).*

ARACIS was active internationally as well; it has participated in actions organised by the ENQA and collaborated with other agencies, structures and organisations in the field of higher education quality assurance, such as the CEENQA, INQAAHE, AUF. Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică continued her mandate as President of the international regional organisation CEENQA and member of the ENQA Board, and was also elected Vice-president of ENQA at the General Meeting of October 2019.

ARACIS requested, within the due deadline, its registration in the European Higher Education Quality Assessment Register (EQAR) to be continued, which is also a legal obligation for the Agency. After completion, in 2018, of the Agency's external evaluation coordinated by ENQA, the final decision to continue registration of ARACIS in EQAR for a five-year period was made by the Register's Committee in April 2019, and was formally communicated to ARACIS in the same month and subsequently published on the Agency's web page. Strengthening of the positive results of the external evaluation of ARACIS have begun with the implementation of a set of measures responding to ENQA and EQAR's observations and proposals to improve its activity. These measures are included in ARACIS's Strategic Plan and in the System Procedures, Operational Procedures and other regulations and procedures of the Agency that are reviewed periodically, as applicable.

As it is always the case, the annual report is an opportunity for me to thank everyone who contributed to the properly carrying out of the Agency's work and express my hope that, in 2020, we will be able to overcome the difficult period that higher education communities and the entire society are going through!

ARACIS President,

Professor Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu

MISSION

(https://www.aracis.ro/en/mission/)

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

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

FOREWORD

This report covers the activities carried out by ARACIS in the period between 03.01.2019 – 31.12.2019.

The report was drafted and finalised by a group coordinated by the Direction of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation (DRIPC), including representatives of all the structures in charge with decision-making, coordination, execution and control at ARACIS, which contributed to the report with supporting information and documents presenting the activities carried out, and proposed future measures aimed at improving the internal quality assurance for the agency's activities.

The following contributed to drafting the report, for the respective indicated activities:

Primary reporting and data processing: Ion Tănase, Director, Economic Direction; Carmen Mirian and Mihaela Băjenaru - Service of Speciality Inspectors and Experts Accreditation and Quality Assurance - higher education; Emilia Mircea and Gianina Buiuc - Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office; Marinela Lolea and Cristian Eni - Organisation, Human Resources, IT and Public Procurement Direction; Daniela Stan and Aureliu Perdeleanu - Public Relations, Registry, Archives and Secretariat Service.

Report analysis: Executive Board of the ARACIS Council: Professor Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu, President; Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Vice-president; Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Director of the Accreditation Department; Associate Professor Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu, Director of the External Quality Evaluation Department; Professor Dr. Eng. Dorian Cojocaru, Secretary General of the ARACIS Council; students Vlad-Valentin Dediu and Petrișor-Laurențiu Țucă, members of the ARACIS Council; Professor Dr. Eng. Anton Hadăr, representative of the largest higher education union organisation in the ARACIS Council; Dr. Eng. Romeo-Cristian Erbaşu, employers' representative in the ARACIS Council.

Coordination and final drafting: Professor Dr. Eng. Radu-Mircea Damian, Director, International Relations, Projects and Cooperation - DRIPC; Adina Nică, Expert, DRIPC.

The drafting group thanks all the members of the ARACIS Council and everyone who contributed in producing the final form of this report!

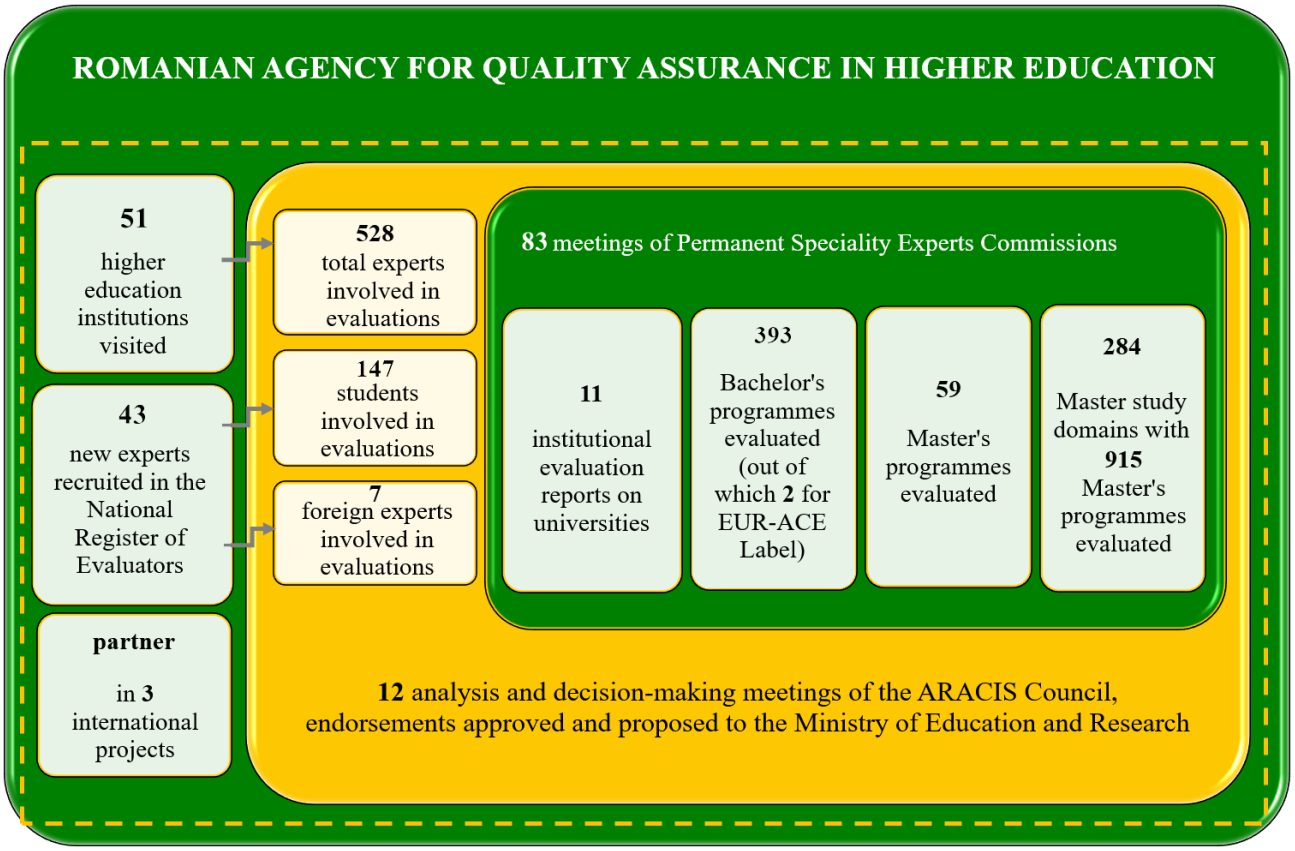
The report was presented and approved in the ARACIS Council.

In its final form, the Report shall be published on the Agency's web page in Romanian and English.

ARACIS ACTIVITY REPORT FOR YEAR 2019

In order to provide all stakeholders and the wider audience with a full picture of the activities of ARACIS, this report starts with a synopsis of the results and activities of external evaluation of the quality of higher education carried out or completed by ARACIS in 2019, along with activities related to participation in international projects and an overview of the human resources engaged.

Synopsis of the main education external quality evaluation activities conducted by ARACIS in year 2019 in realising its mission



1. GENERAL ASPECTS

1.1 Background, legal framework, organisational structure and resources of ARACIS

1.1.1. Background

As a signatory member of the Bologna Declaration (1999), Romania has become part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which is a vast restructuring process of the higher education system in the participating states. Ensuring the quality of education is one of the main goals of the EHEA; to this purpose, in 2005, the ministers in charge with higher education have adopted the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area*. These were drafted based on a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE) and the European Universities Association (EUA).

Considerable progress was achieved at European and national level after 2005, both in relation to quality assurance and along other lines of action within the Bologna Process, such as the framework of qualifications, the recognition and promotion of the using of the results of learning, which all contributed to a paradigm shift towards student-centred learning and teaching.

The **Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ARACIS** was created with a view to evaluating quality assurance in education. The Agency is managed by the ***ARACIS Council*** (the *Council*).

The Agency operates on the grounds of the provisions of the national laws in force and of the *Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS*, (further on referred to as the *Methodology* or the *Evaluation Methodology*) approved by Government Decision (GD) no. 1418/2006, amended by GD 915/2017. The modification was necessary after the ministers in charge with higher education embraced the new *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* at the Conference in Yerevan, Armenia in 2015.

ARACIS is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (**ENQA**) and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this status.

ARACIS is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (**EQAR**) and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this registration.

ARACIS is also a member of other international organisations or networks of higher education quality assurance agencies (**CEENQA**, **ENAEE** and **INQAAHE**), and is represented in the management bodies of some of these organisations and networks.

1.1.2. Legal framework

The institutional articles under which ARACIS was established and the activity of ARACIS are regulated at national level through the following normative documents (www.aracis.ro):

- *Emergency Ordinance of the Government of Romania (GEO) no. 75/2005 on assuring the quality of education, as subsequently amended and supplemented;*
- *Decision of the Government of Romania (GD) no. 915/2017 modifying the appendix to Decision no. 1418/2006 approving the External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS,* further on referred to as the "Methodology";
- *GD no. 1731/2006 to approve the tariffs charged by ARACIS for the authorisation and accreditation per study programmes of higher education institutions and for the external evaluation of the quality of education;*
- *The National Education Law (LEN) no. 1/2011, as subsequently amended and supplemented;*
- *GD no. 369/2013 approving the Methodology for accreditation of study subjects for Master's programmes based on the accredited Master's programmes;*
- *Orders of the Minister of Education and Research* concerning regulation of and/or capitalisation on some specific evaluation activities, which are drafted periodically.

In carrying out its activities, according to the law, ARACIS drafts and uses its own regulations, which are approved by the Council:

- *Guidelines for quality evaluation activities for evaluation of the quality of higher education programmes and higher education institutions*;
- *Guidelines for the periodical external evaluation of the Master study domains;*
- *Code of ethics and professional conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS in assuring and evaluating the quality of higher education in Romania,* further on referred to as the *Code of Ethics*;
- *Specific standards for the external evaluation of the academic quality of Bachelor's and Master's programmes*, used by the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions;
- *Resolutions of the ARACIS Council* and *Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council (BEx)* to address any current issues.

According to the provisions of the *External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS,* approved by Romanian Government Decision no. 1418/2006 and amended by GD 915/2017, the „***Methodology*** provides the conceptual framework and describes the main activities and strategies envisaged in the authorisation/accreditation/periodical evaluation processes and the quality assurance and external quality evaluation processes. The operational and instrumental aspects are detailed in the ***Specific evaluation guidelines,*** further on referred to as the ***ARACIS Guidelines*** or the ***Guidelines***, drafted by ARACIS in consultation with higher education institutions and other interested stakeholders and beneficiaries. The Guidelines, composed of several parts, are approved by the ARACIS Council.

Depending on the developments concerning the requirements for quality assurance in higher education, the ARACIS Council may approve amendments and supplements to the Guidelines.

ARACIS is a body that is entitled by law to issue and propose opinions and recommendations to the Ministry of Education and Research, based on its own evaluations, which materialise its own know-how/experience in the field; therefore, the ARACIS Guidelines and its appendices are recognised in Romania as specific reference norms and regulations in the field of higher education quality assurance. The ***Methodology*** and the ***Guidelines*** ensure alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, further on referred to as the ESG, approved in 2015 at the Yerevan Conference by the ministers in charge with higher education in the European Higher Education Area, in which the quality assurance activities, policies and processes are explicitly defined."

Following some requests received from higher education institutions or other stakeholders, the ARACIS Council approved, in 2019, several punctual modifications of the *Specific standards for external academic quality evaluation in Bachelor's and Master's programmes* of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions.

Concerning the evaluation of doctoral studies, the *Methodology for external evaluation* (approved by Order of the Minister of National Education – OMEN no. 5403/01.11.2018), the Guidelines and other supporting documents were drafted in 2018, which allowed activities for the external evaluation of doctoral studies to start in 2019.

In 2019, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) approved Order no. 3200/21.02.2019 on the *Methodology for the evaluation of doctoral studies and the systems of criteria, standards and performance indicators*, by which the Methodology approved by OMEN no. 5403/01.11.2018 was repealed. The opinion of ARACIS regarding this new Methodology, which was submitted to the MoNE and published on the website of ARACIS in March 2019, was that the provisions of the new Methodology are not compliant with the legal framework in the field of quality assurance in higher education, and they include a set of indicators which, for the most part, are unenforceable and irrelevant.

Therefore, given the discrepancies in relation with the law, the process of evaluation of doctoral studies could not start in 2019; in December 2019, the Ministry of Education and Research proposed, and the Government of Romania approved the deadline for the accreditation of Doctoral Schools to be prorogued until December 31, 2021.

1.1.3. The aim of the ARACIS activities, according to its mission

According to its mission, ARACIS performs the external evaluation of the quality of the education supplied by higher education institutions and education suppliers operating on the territory of Romania and by Romanian education suppliers that legally operate on the territory of other states, according to the legal regulations in force in Romania, in order to:

a) certify the capacity of the education suppliers to reach the quality standards and, thus, meet the expectations of their beneficiaries;

b) contribute to developing an institutional culture of quality in higher education;

c) ensure the protection of direct and indirect beneficiaries of higher education programmes by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent, credible, public, accessible information on the quality of the education supplied by higher education institutions;

d) propose strategies and policies to the line ministry (Ministry of Education and Research) with the aim to continuously improve the quality of higher education, in close correlation with the pre-university education, the demands of employers, and European and international practice;

e) contribute to internationally promoting the high-quality higher education supplied in Romania;

f) ensure better correlation between the skills demanded on the labour market and the results-oriented education provision, in order to increase employment among new graduates, both nationally and in Europe.

The main goal of the activity of ARACIS in Romania is to ensure high-quality higher education and vocational education, in order to enable development of competitive human capital.

According to its international status as an EQAR-registered agency, the Agency can also evaluate the quality of education in higher education institutions abroad, upon the request of such institutions, subject to compliance with the legal regulations of that country.

1.1.4. Organisational structure

ARACIS is an autonomous, independent public institution of national interest, a legal entity that runs its own income and expenditure budget. ARACIS is fully funded through its own revenues.

In order to organise and achieve better efficiency of its activities, ARACIS has drafted its own Organisational and Operational Regulations (ROF), which were later reviewed, supplemented and approved in their new form by the ARACIS Council through its Decision no. 88 of 27 June 2019.

The organisational structure (*Appendix 1 - Organisational structure*) of ARACIS includes:

- the Council;
- the Executive Board of the Council;
- the External Quality Evaluation Department;
- the Accreditation Department;
- the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions;
- the Advisory Board;
- the Ethics Commission;
- the Technical Structure, organised on four speciality lines:
    - Quality Assurance Direction;
    - Economic Direction;
    - Organising, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction;

- Direction of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation.

- One compartment and one office subordinated to the ARACIS president:
  - the Public Internal Audit Compartment;
  - the Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office.

The ***ARACIS Council*** (the *Council*) is composed of **21** members, selected through a public contest according to ARACIS's own procedure that includes professional and scientific competence criteria, professional prestige, etc., out of which: **17** university professors and/or associate professors with full tenure or who continue to teach with the approval of the university senate; **two** students, representatives of nationally representative student federations; **one** representative of the education union organisation and **one** employers' representative (*Appendix 2 – Members of the ARACIS Council (2019)*).

The *Council* is the collective management structure of ARACIS and ensures the programmatic direction of the Agency. The Council sits monthly in an ordinary meeting, and whenever necessary in extraordinary meetings, convened by the president or the vice president (if the president is absent).

The Council carries out the responsibilities laid down in the ARACIS Organisational and Operational Regulations (ROF).

In March - April 2019, in line with the provisions of the *Procedure for selecting the members of the ARACIS Council based on a contest*, seven vacancies (teachers) on the ARACIS Council were published for contest. After the contest, six teaching staff were selected among the eligible candidates, who became members of the Council.

The two students, representatives of the student federations, were validated in the ARACIS Council in October 2019, in compliance with the provisions of the Order of the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research (OMECS) no. 3572, published in the Official Gazette of Romania (MOf) no. 283/27.04.2015 on the *Methodology for nominating the representatives of student federations, the representative of the employers and the representative of the higher education union organisation in the ARACIS Council*, and with the provisions of art. 6 par. (8) of the ROF.

The ***Executive Board of the ARACIS Council*** (BEx) is the operative management structure of ARACIS, composed of the president, the vice president and the secretary general of the ARACIS Council, the director of the External Quality Evaluation Department and the director of the Accreditation Department. The BEx usually sits weekly in ordinary meetings, and whenever necessary in extraordinary meetings, convened by the president or the vice president. The representatives of the student federations in the ARACIS Council and the representative of the education union organisation attend the BEx periodical meetings as guests.

The ***External Quality Evaluation Department*** and the ***Accreditation Department*** are composed of quality assurance experts - members of the Council; each department is coordinated by a director, These departments sit periodically for analysis and debates on the evaluation of education programmes and institutional evaluations, respectively. As a result of the debates, the departments draft their own reports, submitted to the ARACIS Council, with substantiated proposals concerning the extent of compliance of the evaluated study programmes and higher education institutions with the standards and the quality indicators.

The ***ARACIS Advisory Board*** is composed of important persons of the academia; its mission is to check the evaluation procedures and support the decisions of the Agency (*Appendix 3 - Advisory Board*).

The Ethics Commission of ARACIS assures compliance with the *Code of Ethics and norms of professional conduct in the Romanian higher education quality assurance and evaluation activities carried out by ARACIS.* The activities of this Commission are presented at paragraph 1.1.7.

The Disciplinary Commission of ARACIS has the competence to analyse the actions of employees notified as potential disciplinary offences and propose the required measures. There was no permanent Disciplinary Commission at ARACIS before 2019; rather, whenever a disciplinary offence was found, an ad-hoc Disciplinary Commission would be appointed to analyse that notification.

The ARACIS management approved a permanent Disciplinary Commission to be established as per the Council Resolution no. 147/ 19.12.2019, which also established the composition of such Commission. The Disciplinary Commission is composed of **three** members (out of which **two** members of the ARACIS Council and **one** member from the Technical Structure of ARACIS) and it is assisted by one non-voting secretary from the Technical Structure of ARACIS. The members and the secretary of the Commission are on a four-year mandate.

Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions. The ARACIS Council decided that *14 permanent speciality experts commissions* should be operational. These commissions are subordinated to the ARACIS Council. The Commissions operate based on the *Regulations concerning the activities of the permanent speciality experts commissions*, approved by the ARACIS Council, and are assisted by a body of ARACIS expert evaluators who are listed in the ***ARACIS National Register of Evaluators*** (RNE). This body is composed of domestic and foreign university professors and associate professors with recognised professional activities and moral integrity, competence and experience in education quality assurance nationally and internationally. In order to become RNE-listed evaluators, the candidates undergo a transparent selection process regulated through a public procedure approved by the ARACIS Council.

Contests were organised in 2019 to supplement the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions, based on the needs identified in each Commission.

Furthermore, based on the Resolution of the ARACIS Council, in order to involve a more diverse category of stakeholder in several types of quality assurance activities carried out by ARACIS, a contest was held in May-July 2019 to select representatives of employers on the two Permanent Engineering Sciences Speciality Experts Commissions of ARACIS, and two representatives of employers were selected as a result of the contest on each of the two Commissions.

The ***Technical Structure*** of ARACIS is an executive structure of 72 staff positions, out of which 33 staffed and 39 vacant positions at the beginning of 2019.

The individual employment contracts of **two** employees of the technical structure ended in 2019 by mutual agreement of the parties.

In line with the provisions of the law, vacancies were listed for contest in 2019, and **three** new staff were employed as a result.

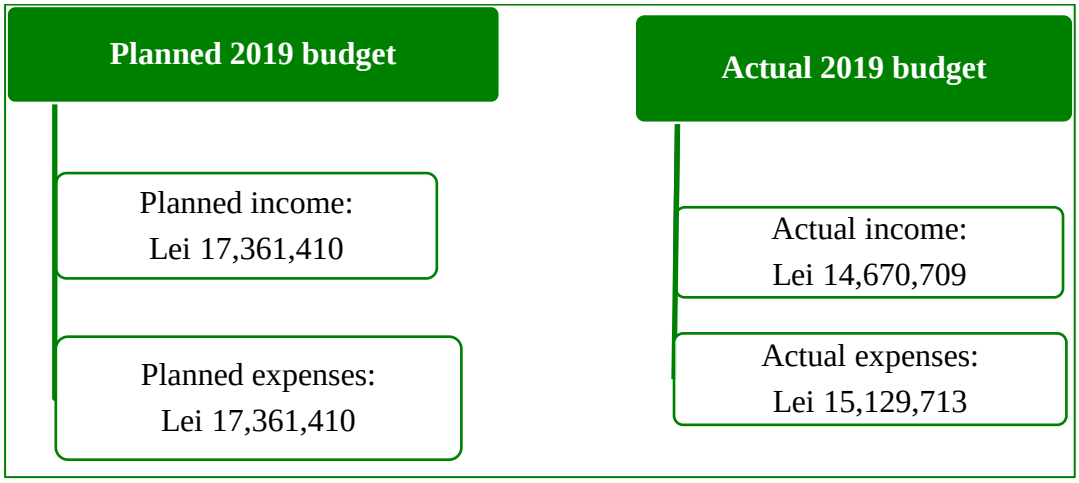
1.1.5. The financial activity of ARACIS

According to the laws in force, the revenues of ARACIS are generated from internal sources, such as fees for external authorisation / accreditation for provisional operation and/or periodical evaluation activities for study programmes, Master's study domains and/or institutional evaluations, based on service contracts concluded with higher education institutions, and financial revenues such as interests and external non-reimbursable funds (FEN).

For year 2019, the ARACIS Council approved an income and expenditure budget of Lei 17,361,410 for both incomes and expenditure (*Figure 1*), out of which Lei 4,521,434 incomes and Lei 4,660,500 for expenses under projects funded from FEN.

As of December 31, 2019, the estimated revenues cashed by ARACIS were Lei 14,670,709, out of which Lei 3,734,933 from FEN, while actual payments amounted to Lei 15,129,713, out of which Lei 4,136,355 from projects funded from FEN.

Figure 1 **– ARACIS income and expenditure budget for year 2019**



These data were established in compliance with the applicable legal provisions in Romania.

As the data presented above indicate, an amount of Lei 2,690,701 of the incomes was not realised, out of which Lei 785,159 pertaining to the basic activity and Lei 1,905,542 pertaining to the FEN - funded activity; furthermore, an amount of Lei 2,231,697 of the expenses was not realised, out of which Lei 1,707,552 pertaining to the basic activity and Lei 524,145 pertaining to the FEN - funded activity. The differences between the planned and the actual amounts pertaining to incomes and expenditures under the basic activity are caused by a smaller number of evaluation contracts concluded with higher education institutions, mainly due to the fact that the periodical evaluation of study programmes was carried out within the institutional evaluations, which led to periodical individual evaluations being conducted for a smaller number of study programmes, a smaller number of institutional evaluations carried out and, in some cases, evaluation processes that were not completed by the end of 2019. The differences pertaining to the FEN - funded activity are caused by the postponement of the implementation deadline for the SIPOCA/SMIS2014:16 project as per the

addenda to the funding contract. The financial statements on December 31, 2019 indicate that the funds were managed properly during 2019, according to the law, given the actual circumstances described above.

1.1.6. The juridical activity of ARACIS

In 2019, as a result of the evaluation missions conducted and the enforcement of all legal procedures concerning passing of decisions and granting of judgments, including complaint procedures, ARACIS had to appear in court in some cases, as a result of the complaints of some of the evaluated entities, in order to protect the decisions it had passed.

Thus, ARACIS acted as the defendant in seven court cases. The defence pleas were formulated for all cases, in actuality and in law, by drafting denials of claims and enclosing supporting documents. Up to now, out of all the cases on the docket of the courts, those for which trial was held were won by ARACIS.

The evaluation activities conducted in 2019 required a large number of expert evaluators to be involved; therefore, 2,950 external quality evaluation contracts were concluded with expert evaluators, meaning an increase of 72% from year 2018. The increased number of contracts concluded in 2019 compared to 2018 is the result of the increased number of external evaluations performed by ARACIS in 2019, with a contract being concluded with each member of the team of evaluators for each evaluation. Thus, the number of evaluated Bachelor's programmes increased by 65%, and the number of evaluated Master's study domains increased by 248% - namely, 284 domains in 2019, compared to 11 domains in 2018 when the Agency started to conduct such evaluations.

The difference is also given by an increased number of meetings of the Permanent Speciality Expert Commissions, as a contract is concluded with each member of the Commission for each individual meeting of the Commission.

39 BEx Decisions and 150 ARACIS Council Resolutions were drafted for year 2019, pertaining to various circumstances and cases. All the BEx Decisions and Council Resolutions were subject to the internal transparency, communication, personal data protection, numbering and archiving procedures.

Furthermore, all templates of service contracts that ARACIS uses in its evaluation activity and signs with the higher education institutions, as well as the template contracts for quality evaluation, concluded by ARACIS with domestic and international expert evaluators have been drafted and updated.

1.1.7. Internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance includes all the activities carried out by the agency, namely external evaluation activities and professional and administrative activities carried out by the agency's own staff. Procedures were drafted and reviewed in 2019, concerning the internal activities carried out by the agency's organisational structures, as well as procedures that regulate quality assurance in external evaluation processes.

All ARACIS activities are carried out in compliance with the provisions of the *Code of Ethics and norms of conduct* (further on referred to as the "Code of Ethics"). The Ethics Commission of ARACIS operationally ensures compliance with the provisions of the Code of Ethics.

Through the provisions of its Code of Ethics, ARACIS aligns to the principles and provisions of the Expert Evaluators' Code of Conduct of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The Code of Ethics is periodically improved; the edition in force is the 3rd edition, revised and supplemented, approved in the ARACIS Council Meeting of September 28, 2017. The Code of Ethics applies to all employees and external collaborators involved in ARACIS's activities.

The Ethics Commission (CE) of ARACIS has five members: *a president*, member of the Council, and *four members*, three of which are members of the Council – a teacher, a student, and the representative of the union in the field of education, and the fourth one is appointed by the ARACIS Council among the permanent staff of the Agency. The Ethics Commission operates on a four-year mandate. The membership of the Ethics Commission, approved by the ARACIS Council on 25.01.2018, was modified on the occasion of the change of the representatives of the students' federations, on the ARACIS Council's meeting of 22.04.2019, on which occasion the membership of the Commission's Secretariat was approved as well.

The Ethics Commission is assisted by a legal adviser in drafting its resolutions.

External evaluation activities

External evaluation activities involve members of the ARACIS Council, external expert evaluators from the categories listed in the RNE, and the Agency's own staff - inspectors and/or speciality experts involved in professional activities that are directly linked to the evaluation process. The ARACIS Advisory Board plays a key role in monitoring compliance with the procedures and ethical norms during the institutional evaluation procedures.

As ARACIS assigns special importance to the compliance with evaluation procedures and ethical norms, the number of registered violations was very small all along the operation of the Agency, and such violations were merely isolated cases. Despite that, a *Note* was registered in 2019 for the Ethics Commission, concerning the situation of a permanent expert of one of ARACIS's speciality commissions.

The ARACIS management notified the Ethics Commission, which then pursued all the stages set forth in the Code of Ethics. The suspicion of breach under the provisions of the Code of Ethics concerned the expert of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commission of ARACIS who, in his capacity as a coordinator of a visiting team, participated in the evaluation of a Bachelor's study programme in a university, while being on the Staff Scheme of another Bachelor's study programme at that university.

After reviewing the existing supporting documents, the Ethics Commission found that a conflict of interests was in place. The details of the activity and the conclusions are contained in the documents of the Ethics Commission.

The draft resolution developed by the Ethics Commission was sent to the person suspected to have violated the provisions of the Code of Ethics, who was asked to formulate a representation; further on, the documents were forwarded to the BEx and then to the ARACIS Council.

After reviewing the information presented in the Draft Resolution written by the Ethics Commission and after the debates, the ARACIS Council decided to approve the Draft Resolution and established sanctions that were published on the Agency's web page.

Professional and administrative activities

The Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office of ARACIS, through its internal quality assurance component, coordinates and provides logistic support for the current management and internal quality assurance activities, and its overall goal is to establish a culture of quality consciously endorsed by the entire personnel of the Agency.

The Agency implements a quality management system that includes regulations and procedures, as well as persons in charge, decision-making and executive structures, resources, and infrastructure.

By applying the quality management system, the ARACIS management commits to:

- meeting the requests of the stakeholders;
- ensuring the infrastructure and adequate working environment to enable proper deployment of all processes and resources needed for the goals to be achieved;
- complying with the applicable legislation in force;
- continuously improving the quality management system.

24 procedures were drafted and reviewed in 2019, out of the total of **48** documented procedures (operational and system procedures) concerning the internal activities carried out by the organisational structures within the Agency.

In 2019, the ARACIS management continued to improve the Managerial Internal Control System (SCIM), as per the provisions of GO no. 119/1999 on managerial internal control and preventive financial control, reissued as subsequently amended and supplemented, and the provisions of the OSGG no. 600/2018 to approve the Code of managerial internal control for public entities.

The following activities were conducted with a view to developing the managerial internal control system:

- materials were drafted to support the implementation of the MICS in the internal structures of the Agency;
- data submitted by the organisational structures within ARACIS were recorded, centralised and processed;
- the Managerial internal control system development programme of ARACIS was drafted;
- preparing and organising the meetings, drafting the protocols, minutes of the meetings and the Decisions of the Monitoring Commission;
- ensuring technical support for the development of the managerial internal control system;
- drafting the Synthesis Report on the results of the self-assessment process and the Report on the progress in the implementation and development of the managerial internal control system.

The Monitoring Commission (CM) includes the heads of the compartments included in the first tier of management in the Agency's organisational structure, except for the Public Internal Audit Compartment; its role is to monitor, coordinate and provide methodological guidance for the implementation and the development of the managerial internal control system at ARACIS. The way in which the Commission is organised and operates is described in the *Organising and Operating Regulations of the Monitoring Commission for the implementation and the development of the managerial internal control system at ARACIS,* which was revised in 2019.

In 2019, through a Decision of the BEx, a new President of the Monitoring Commission was appointed in the person of Mr Dorian Cojocaru, Secretary General of the ARACIS Council.

Year 2019 was a year of progress in revising and implementing internal quality assurance procedures for the Agency's activities. However, the implementation of the managerial internal control system is a continuous, long-lasting process and requires comprehensive management instruments to be developed.

In 2019, the ARACIS Council revised the *Organising and Operating Regulations of the Agency*, following the recommendations of the Central Harmonisation Unit for Public Internal Audit (UCAAPI) on including public internal audit responsibilities in the content of these Regulations.

In 2019, an employee of the Organisation, IT, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction - IT Compartment attended the accredited "Course for training of personal data protection officers", the aim of which was to improve knowledge and practical skills to enable proper performance of the responsibilities of a personal data protection officer, in line with the general regulations in force in Romania, namely *Law no. 190/2018 regarding some measures for the implementation of the European Union Regulation 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC*.

Furthermore, between 14 - 17 November 2019, the internal quality assurance expert of the Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office attended a training course in Bucharest on practical modalities of implementing a managerial internal control system in public institutions, in line with the Order of the Government's Secretariat General no. 600/2018.

The topics approached in the training course included:

- process approaches in public institutions;
- the concept of managerial internal control in public institutions;
- planning of activities for the implementation of a managerial internal control system in a public institution;
- implementation of a risk management system in public institutions;
- organising of a managerial internal control system in public institutions;
- aim and definition of managerial internal control standards;
- design and implementation of internal control systems in public institutions in line with the managerial internal control standards.

Furthermore, in 31 October - 01 November 2019, the internal quality assurance expert of the Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office attended the working meeting of the users of the PCUe (Electronic Single Checkpoint) platform, organised at the "Transilvania" University of Brașov by the CNRED (National Center for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas) in collaboration with the Romanian Digital Agenda Agency (AADR).

The goal of this meeting was to present the measures for enrolling institutions and configuring all IT and operational procedures of public authorities and institutions in the field of education on the PCUe (Electronic Single Checkpoint) platform.

1.1.8. Activity of the Public Internal Audit Compartment at ARACIS

Contests were organised in 2019 to staff the two vacancies at the Internal Public Audit Compartment, which resulted in one Public Internal Auditor being employed, who worked in the period between 12 June - 09 August 2019. During the performance of the individual employment contract of this auditor, informative notes were drafted and sent to UCAAPI on the fulfilment of some measures and documents ensuring the organisational framework of the public internal audit activity.

No public internal audit missions were organised in 2019.

After the activity of this auditor ended, the institution continued its activities aimed at employing new auditors, and organised contests in the periods of 08 August - 06 September 2019 and 19 November - 11 December 2019 to staff the two vacancies; however, no candidate enrolled for these contests.

1.2 Summary of activities

Management of current activities

During 2019, the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council sat in meetings that were usually organised weekly, and in extraordinary meetings organised whenever necessary. On such occasions, the BEx reviewed the requests and other documents received by it for review and decision, and formulated resolutions, which were forwarded directly to the applicants or submitted to the ARACIS Council for review and approval.

In all these cases, irrespective of the form of the requests (letters, e-mail, phone requests, etc.), the responses were formulated within the legal deadline and within the limits of ARACIS's competence.

One complaint which met all the requirements for review was submitted in the reference period. This complaint concerned a Bachelor's study programme. In order to review and solve the complaint, the specific procedure of ARACIS was applied, following which the Complaint Solving Commission rejected the complaint; the resolution was endorsed by the ARACIS Council.

Collaboration with higher education institutions and with other stakeholders (structures and persons)

The Executive Board of the ARACIS Council organised hearings for the interested natural entities or the representatives of the interested institutions, such as: rectors of higher education institutions; presidents of associations or foundations; university professors; journalists; students, etc., and

provided written answers to the requests of the higher education institutions in Romania or of other people.

The entire activity carried out by ARACIS in 2019 was based on expanding the collaboration with stakeholders in assuring quality in the higher education system in Romania. ARACIS was an active partner of Romanian universities, and through its activities and projects supported their efforts towards assuring and improving quality, as well as the efforts of the Ministry of Education and Research towards drafting and/or revising some national regulations in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

Furthermore, ARACIS continued to cooperate with the Romanian Pre-University Education Quality Assurance Agency (ARACIP), by attending meetings of significance for the educational system in Romania.

Students' involvement

Regarding the activity of students - students were permanently involved and supported by the ARACIS Council, and they participated in the external quality evaluation visits.

Students are full members in the ARACIS Council; the attend the meetings of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council, and participate in all evaluations (institutional evaluations; evaluations of study domains for Master's programmes; evaluations of higher education study programmes) carried out by the Agency.

Three specific student training sessions were carried out in 2019. Based on the information received from students' federations regarding the student status and the results obtained in knowledge tests, the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators – Students (RNE-S) was updated in 2019. The composition of the RNE-S, posted on the webpage of ARACIS, (http://www.aracis.ro/registrul-national-al-evaluatorilor) is periodically updated and supplemented.

ARACIS continued to engage students in all external evaluation processes, in line with the regulations in force in Romania and the provisions of ESG 2015. The process of selecting new student representatives in the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions in 2019 was carried out in compliance with the provisions of the *Procedure for selecting and appointing students, members of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions*.

Evaluation of the Agency's activity by beneficiaries and other stakeholders

The Agency pays great attention to how it carries out its activities in order to enable continuous improvement of such activities. To this purpose, after introducing and disseminating a *Feedback questionnaire* in 2018 to obtain information about how the evaluated institution perceives the Agency's activity, ARACIS continued to apply the Questionnaire in 2019. This approach is a continuation of the activities presented in the *Barometer of quality in the higher education system*, published by ARACIS in 2015, and intends to continuously identify measures to improve the level of the external quality assurance procedures.

2. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND ARACIS EVALUATORS

As we have shown, approval by the ministers in charge with higher education of the new *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education* – ESG 2015 at the Ministers' Conference of Yerevan (Armenia, May 14-15, 2015) brought about the need to revise the external evaluation Methodology of ARACIS, approved by Government Decision no. 915/2017 published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 25/11.01.2018.

Revision of the Methodology in 2018 also aimed at shifting the focus of the evaluation processes from the entry indicators to a result-based evaluation, with greater accountability created at the level of internal higher education quality assurance structures. The methodology revised in 2018 implements the provisions of ESG 2015 in the approved criteria, standards and performance indicators, which will continue to be improved through greater involvement of stakeholders from various categories in quality assurance activities.

For ARACIS, improving the criteria, standards and performance indicators is a continuous concern and a continuous process. Thus, the QAFIN project, conducted with the support of the World Bank, in which ARACIS is a partner, and the implementation of which started in 2017 and will continue until 2020, provides additional support in improving the quality of internal and external quality assurance processes.

2.1 Evaluations conducted by ARACIS in 2019

2.1.1 Evaluation of study programmes

In 2019, ARACIS received **439** requests for external quality evaluation services from universities for Bachelor's and Master's programmes, and **12** requests for evaluation of the Psycho-pedagogical Training Programme for certification of skills for the teaching profession.

25 higher education institutions approached the Agency with requests for the periodical external evaluation of **246** Master's study domains.

Furthermore, **nine** requests for institutional evaluation were filed.

In order to respond to these requests, the Accreditation Department of ARACIS operated according to its prerogatives laid down in the ROF, as follows:

- drafting of the internal reports of ARACIS, with support from the staff of the technical structure of ARACIS, for the validation of the results of the missions for the evaluation of programmes for provisional authorisation (PA), accreditation (A) or periodical evaluation (PE) (for continuation of the accreditation);
- organising and managing the database of education programme evaluations;
- management and updating of the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators.

Tables 2.1.1.1 – 2.1.1.2 give a report on the study programmes supplied by universities in Romania, evaluated by ARACIS in 2019. Most of the evaluation activities were for accredited study programmes, evaluated periodically to maintain their accreditation. 7.9% of the evaluated programmes were new programmes proposed for provisional authorizing to operate. 1% of these did

not obtain judgments to support a proposal for granting of the provisional operation authorisation approval.

Concerning programmes subject to periodical evaluation, the majority of these (96.46%) obtained an approval to maintain their accreditation with a "Confidence" judgment, and those that were evaluated for accreditation obtained accreditation.

Table 2.1.1.1 Report on BACHELOR'S programmes evaluated in 2019 per type of evaluation (AP / A / EP)

Authorisation - Bachelor's programmes – total = 31
Accreditation - Bachelor's programmes – total = 51
Periodical evaluation - Bachelor's programmes – total = 311
} ***TOTAL = 393***

Table 2.1.1.2 Report on BACHELOR'S programmes evaluated in 2019 per judgment awarded

Bachelor's programmes evaluated in 2019 – full time education (IF)

Authorisation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IF			**Accreditation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IF**			**Periodical evaluation - BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IF**		
Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence
27	-	3	46	-	-	273	7	3
Total = 30			**Total = 46**			**Total = 283**		

Bachelor's programmes evaluated in 2019 – part-time education (IFR)

Authorisation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IFR			**Accreditation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IFR**			**Periodical evaluation - BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IFR**		
Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence
-	-	-	4	-	-	12	-	-
Total = -			**Total = 4**			**Total = 12**		

Bachelor's programmes evaluated in 2019 – distance learning (ID)

Authorisation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME ID			**Accreditation – BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME ID**			**Periodical evaluation - BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME ID**		
Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence	Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence
1	-	-	1	-	-	15	1	-
Total = 1			**Total = 1**			**Total = 16**		

Psycho-pedagogical training programmes for certification of skills for the teaching profession = **12**

Preparatory programmes of Romanian for foreigners = **28**

2.1.2 Institutional evaluations

Regarding higher education institutions, the state of fact in the national higher education system in 2019 was as follows, in line with GD 326/2019 as subsequently amended and supplemented (academic year 2019 - 2020):

- Public universities: **55** – *underwent external evaluation at least once*;
- Accredited private universities: **34,** out of which **three** operate in liquidation with all the programmes included in their structure (according to the advises forwarded to the Ministry of Education and Research subsequent to the ARACIS evaluations), and **two** are under monitoring procedures based on Orders of the Minister of Education and Research. *All these universities were evaluated by ARACIS at least once.*
- Private universities authorised for provisional operation: **nine,** out of which **two** operate in liquidation with all the programmes included in their structure (one of these only delivers Master's programmes). Out of these, *two have been evaluated by ARACIS* (the institution that only delivers Master's programmes and one institution for which ARACIS proposed accreditation not to be granted).

External institutional evaluations were completed in 2019 for **11** higher education institutions in Romania. *Tables 2.1.2.1 – 2.1.2.2* show details of the institutional evaluations conducted in 2019:

Table 2.1.2.1 Institutional evaluations conducted by ARACIS in 2019, grouped per the judgment obtained

Institutional evaluations conducted in 2019 = **11 universities**				
High degree of confidence	**Confidence**	**Limited degree of confidence**	**Lack of confidence**	**Institutional accreditation**
5	3	2	1	-

Table 2.1.2.2 Programmes evaluated within the institutional evaluations conducted in 2019

Bachelor's programmes evaluated within the institutional evaluations	**Full time education (IF)**	**Part-time time education (IFR)**	**Distance learning (ID)**
TOTAL = 71	69	-	2
Master's study domains evaluated within the institutional evaluations		**Master's programmes evaluated within the evaluations of Master's study domains within institutional evaluations**	
5		6	

In 2019, at events attended by teaching staff, students, administrative staff, employers' representatives, rectors of higher education institutions, the president of ARACIS handed out the certificates confirming the "High Degree of Confidence" judgment acquired following the institutional evaluations conducted by the Agency in 2018 - 2019.

2.1.3 Evaluation of Master's study domains

Tables 2.1.3.1 – 2.1.3.2 give an overview on the Master's programmes evaluated by ARACIS in 2019:

Table 2.1.3.1 Master's programmes evaluated in 2019 - full time education

Accreditation – MASTER'S PROGRAMME IF				Inclusion in an accredited Master's study domain	
Confidence	**Limited confidence**	**No confidence**		**Inclusion**	**Non-inclusion**
12	-	1		40	6
Total = 13				**Total = 46**	

Table 2.1.3.2 Evaluation of Master's study domains

Evaluated Master's study domain Confidence judgment with continuation of accreditation	Master's programmes evaluated within the evaluations of Master's study domains Confidence judgment	Full time education (IF)	Part-time education (IFR)
284	915	888	27

2.2 The ARACIS National Register of Evaluators

2.2.1 Updating of the National Register of Evaluators

The National Register of Evaluators - RNE was updated in 2019 and **43** new evaluators were admitted as a result of the specific evaluation procedure. A detailed report on the newly included evaluators, broken down per Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions, is given in *Table 2.2.1.1*.

Table 2.2.1.1 Number of evaluators admitted into the RNE, per Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions

Commission	Number of evaluators admitted in 2019
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	8
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	1
C3 - Legal Sciences	2
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	7
C6 - Economic Sciences I	1
C7 - Economic Sciences II	1
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	7
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	6

Commission	Number of evaluators admitted in 2019
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	6
C12 - Medical Sciences	4
Total evaluators admitted in 2019	**43**

In 2019, 53 evaluators took training on the online training platform for which the IT Compartment has provided technical support. The online training taken by expert evaluators is part of their continuous training to enable updating of their know-how on internal and external quality assurance in education (*Table 2.2.1.2*).

Table 2.2.1.2 Total number of trainees (per each training course) who accessed and were trained on the SeECIS platform (training access Log) in 2019

Item no.	Course/Activity	No. of trainees
1	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)	2
2	Specific standards for the preparatory Romanian language year for foreign citizens	4
3	Specific standards - Bachelor's - Legal Sciences	1
4	Specific standards - Master's - Legal Sciences	1
5	Specific standards - Bachelor's - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	1
6	External evaluation of Master's programmes	3
7	Periodical external evaluation of Master's study domains	8
8	Synthesis of key changes - External evaluation methodology	1
9	Specific standards for external evaluation of the academic quality of Bachelor's programmes in the Bachelor's study domains pertaining to the Speciality Commissions for Economic Sciences I and II	2
10	Specific standards for external evaluation of the academic quality of Master's programmes pertaining to the Speciality Commissions for Economic Sciences I and II	1
11	Provision of the higher education system versus high school graduates	3
12	Status of implementation of the 2020 Strategy for tertiary education - statistical data for 2016	4
13	Diagnostics of Master's study domains and programmes based on statistical data	4
14	Doctoral programmes - statistical data	7

Item no.	Course/Activity	No. of trainees
15	Specific standards for external evaluation of the academic quality of Master's programmes pertaining to the Speciality Commission for Administrative Educational Sciences and Psychology	7
16	Procedures for Master's programmes	1
17	European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education - Module I	1
18	European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education - Module II - External quality assurance	1
19	European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education - Module III - Quality assurance for agencies	1

2.2.2 Updating of the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators - Students

The table below gives an overview on the student evaluators listed in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators - Students:

Table 2.2.2. Number of student evaluators in the RNE-S, per nationally recognised federations

Students federation	Number of student evaluators in 2019
National Alliance of Students' Organisations in Romania (ANOSR)	123
National Students' Union of Romania (UNSR)	102
Romanian Students' Union (USR)	38
Total student evaluators in the National Register of Evaluators - Students in 2019	**263**

2.2.3 Updating of the membership of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions

Several contests were organised in 2019 to recruit new members in the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions of ARACIS. An overview of these is given in the table below:

Table 2.2.3. Number of new evaluators selected and approved for membership in the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions of ARACIS

Commission	Number of new members selected and approved		
Date of validation in ARACIS Council	31/01/2019	25/07/2019	19/12/2019
C1	1	3	
C2	1		1
C3		1	2
C4		1	

Commission	Number of new members selected and approved		
Date of validation in ARACIS Council	31/01/2019	25/07/2019	19/12/2019
C5		3	1
C6		2	
C7		2	
C8	1	3	1
C9	2	1	
C10	4	3	
C11	1	3	1
C12	1		

2.2.4 Procurement of IT equipment and services

Tender books and/or technical specifications were drafted in 2019 for the procurement of various IT products or services. Thus, the following IT products and services were purchased:

- Acrobat Reader Professional software - two licenses;
- Desktop computers (25);
- Smart blackboard;
- Technical services - accounting programme maintenance;
- Computer system maintenance services;
- Maintenance services for copying machines;
- Servers and software packages (computer system composed of four servers, processing module, storage, and virtualisation software packages) - purchased under the QAFIN project;
- Website development services - purchased under the QAFIN project.

3. COOPERATION

3.1 National cooperation

ARACIS cooperates continuously with higher education institutions to fulfil its responsibilities related to the external evaluation in order to ensure the academic quality of higher education suppliers, study programmes and Master's study domains, in line with the standards and methodology approved by Government Decisions.

Thus, upon the request of higher education institutions of Romania, the *Specific standards for external academic quality evaluation of Bachelor's and Master's programmes* pertaining to some of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions were revised.

ARACIS representatives also attended the meetings of the National Rectors' Council and other national events organised in 2019, where they delivered several presentations on the topic of quality assurance in higher education.

ARACIS had permanent consultations with the Ministry of Education and Research; the National Council for Certification of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU); the Executive Unit for Funding in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI); the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC) and other higher education institutions, and stakeholders (persons/structures/organisations), with the purpose to ensure quality of the higher education system.

3.2 International cooperation

3.2.1 Activities within ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Within the European Higher Education Area, ARACIS is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2009, and it periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this status.

We mention here that ENQA conducted the most recent external evaluation of ARACIS in 2017 – 2018 and, as a result of this evaluation, on 13.09.2018, the ENQA Board reconfirmed ARACIS's ENQA membership for another five-year period as of the aforementioned date. This membership is proof that the provisions of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) continue to be complied with.

ARACIS has the obligation, under the law, to ensure its listing in the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education* – EQAR and periodically undergo the institutional accreditation procedures. ARACIS's ENQA membership, confirmed after the external evaluation coordinated by ENQA, was an important element in the decision of EQAR, which was based on the organisation's own evaluation, by which the Register's Board approved continuation of the Agency's EQAR listing.

In order to implement ENQA's policy regarding active involvement of agencies in the Association's activities, ARACIS representatives attended the following events organised by the Association in 2019:

- **23 - 24 January**, The Hague (Netherlands) – ENQA Strategy Day (attending: Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică - ARACIS Vice-president);
- **25 - 26 April**, Tallinn (Estonia) - Forum of ENQA Member Agencies (attending: Mr Iordan Petrescu – ARACIS President; Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică);
- **14 June**, ENQA webinar on subject-specific approaches (attending: Mr Radu-Mircea Damian - Director, International Relations, Projects and Cooperation - DRIPC);

- **01 - 02 October**, Porto (Portugal) – Seminar for recently reviewed agencies (attending: Mr Radu-Mircea Damian, Mrs Adina Nică – DRIPC expert);
- **17 – 18 October**, Yerevan (Armenia) – ENQA General Assembly (attending: Mr Iordan Petrescu, Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică). Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică was elected ENQA Vice-president at this event;
- **04 December**, ENQA webinar "How to prepare a good self-assessment report for an ENQA Agency Review – Value of the process for the agency's development" (attending: Mr Radu-Mircea Damian, Mrs Adina Nică).

The ARACIS management also appointed an expert of the technical structure, namely Mr Vlad Popescu (expert at the Experts Speciality Inspectors Service - Accreditation and Quality Assurance - Higher Education) to attend ENQA Leadership Programme, scheduled to take place in three seminars, two of which were held in 2019, as follows:

- **21 – 23 October**, Vienna (Austria);
- **11 – 13 December**, Bucharest (Romania).

The third seminar of the programme was held during 04 – 06 March 2020 at The Hague (Netherlands), before this report was completed.

ARACIS provided administrative and logistic support for ENQA in organising the second Seminar (11 – 13 December) of the Leadership Programme in Bucharest, at the Agency's offices, for 24 trainees.

In early April 2019, as part of the cooperation relationships with ENQA, ARACIS received the visit of ENQA's management, represented by Mr Christoph Grolimund – ENQA President and Mrs Maria Kelo – Director, at the Agency's offices.

Furthermore, Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică attended the ENQA Board meetings and other meetings organised by it.

3.2.2 Activities at EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ARACIS is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (**EQAR**) since 2009 and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for it to maintain this capacity.

Along 2017 – 2018, ARACIS initiated and continued the activities to ensure renewal of the Agency's ENQA membership.

The final decision to continue to have ARACIS registered in EQAR for a five-year period was made by the Register Committee in April 2019, and formally communicated to ARACIS in the same month and then published on the Agency's web page.

Furthermore, in early April 2019, ARACIS had a visit from a representative of EQAR's administrative structure, namely Mrs Melinda Szabó - Senior Policy Analyst.

In April 2019, at the Politehnica University of Bucharest, Romania hosted the meetings of EQAR's General Assembly and Register Committee.

As part of the collaboration between ARACIS and EQAR, the activities carried out under „The Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR)" project coordinated by EQAR continued in 2019, and ARACIS was one of the partner quality assurance agencies in the project. *Section 5. Projects* provides more details about the DEQAR project.

3.2.3 Activities within the ENAEE - European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

ARACIS is a member of the *European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education* (ENAEE) and authorised since 2013 by the ENAEE to provide EUR-ACE® Label certification for Bachelor's programmes in engineering accredited under ARACIS evaluations. The external evaluation process conducted by ENAEE started in 2017 and continued in 2018, in order to re-authorise the Agency to provide the certification; the authorisation was extended until the end of 2019. The period was further extended at the meeting of the EUR-ACE Certification Committee of May 20, 2019 to last until December 31, 2022.

Based on the documentation drafted by ARACIS and as a result of the training sessions organised for expert evaluators representing employers, evaluation visits for EUR-ACE® certification were conducted in 2019. The list of EUR-ACE certified Bachelor's programmes with certification granted by ARACIS in 2019 is given in *Table 3.2.3.1*.

Table 3.2.3.1

No.	University	Study programme
1	"Transilvania" University of Brasov	Control and expert analysis of food products*
2		Engineering and quality management**

** Pending ENAEE approval; ** ENAEE approved*

ARACIS was represented every time at the events organised by ENAEE in **2019**:

- **20 May**, London (United Kingdom) - Meeting of ENAEE's EUR-ACE Label Committee (LC) (attending: Mrs Simona Lache, Director of ARACIS Accreditation Department);
- **22 - 25 September**, Dublin (Ireland) – Evaluation visit for re-authorisation of the Engineers Ireland Agency for EUR-ACE Label certifications (attending: Mrs Simona Lache);
- **19 October**, Madrid (Spain) - Meeting of the ENAEE EUR-ACE Label Committee (attending: Mrs Simona Lache);
- **21 – 22 October**, Madrid (Spain) – ENAEE General Assembly (attending: Mr Dorian Cojocaru, ARACIS Secretary General).

3.2.4 Activities with the CEENQA - Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

ARACIS was represented at the CEENQA General Assembly (attending: Mr Iordan Petrescu, Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică) held in **17 – 18 May** in Kyrenia (Cyprus).

Along 2019, ARACIS sent contributions for the two issues of the CEENQA Newsletter:

- July 2019, the paper on "Sharing ARACIS Quality Assurance Dissemination Practice with CEENQA Partners";
- December 2019, the paper on "Enhancing Stakeholders' Engagement in External Quality Assurance: A Romanian Initiative - the ESQA Project on the Run".

Furthermore, Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică carried out all her responsibilities as CEENQA President.

3.2.5 Activities with the INQAAHE - International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

Ever since it was established, ARACIS is a member of INQAAHE and participates in the activities of INQAAHE, such as polls, electing the Network's management, etc.

3.2.6 Other international activities

Cooperation with other quality assurance agencies

Within its relations with other quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area, ARACIS continued to be involved in the activities of the **Quality Audit Network** (QAN) informal cooperation network. ARACIS is the only Eastern-Europe agency member of the QAN (since 2012); the Agency's activity within this cooperation network was continuous and contributed to enhancing the international visibility of ARACIS. In addition, the topics discussed within the QAN are similar to the interests and priorities of ARACIS.

Under the Partnership Agreement signed in 2018 by ARACIS with the **Republic of Moldova's National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC)**, in the spring of 2019, the representatives of ARACIS, namely Mr Iordan Petrescu (President) and Mrs Emilia Gogu (Expert evaluator) attended the round table debates on the *Methodology for classification of higher education institutions and ranking of study programmes* developed under the QAFIN project. On the same occasion, two thematic papers issued by ARACIS, *Genesis and evolution of higher education in Romania - statistical data*, and *Centennial evolution of education in Romania* were released in Chișinău.

Besides ANACEC members, these events were also attended by representatives of higher education institutions from the Republic of Moldova.

In 2019, DRIPC supplied the data needed for the periodical updating of the information requested by ENQA, EQAR, CEENQA and INQAAHE to ensure the visibility of the member agencies of these organisations and structures.

Activities in the Bologna Follow-Up Group -BFUG

Along 2019, Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, in her capacity as the Vice-president of ARACIS and member of the **Bologna Follow-Up Group** (BFUG), attended the meetings of BFUG.

One of these meetings was held in Bucharest in April 2019, and was organised with support from the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research and the Politehnica University of Bucharest, with the latter being the host of this event.

In 2019, ARACIS participated in drafting and conducting consultations for the completion of the Action Plan of BFUG's Peer Support Group - C on quality assurance, and in implementing the activities for which the Agency is nominated. Among these is initiation of contacts with other quality assurance agencies in order to implement international mobility of their staff for experience sharing and dissemination of good practice under the Staff Mobility project.

ARACIS was a partner in the *Effective Involvement of Stakeholders in External Quality Assurance Activities Project (ESQA),* co-funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme - KA3 – Support to Policy Reform action. Thus, as part of the study on the current involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance, ARACIS sent the data requested by ENQA in July 2019 from members and affiliates, and contributed to the materialisation of the study that ENQA was to complete in 2020. Details about the ESQA project can be found at section 5.3.3 of this report.

4. INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION

The ARACIS web page

The main means of communicating information concerning the activities of ARACIS is the Agency's web page: ww.aracis.ro; the page was permanently updated in 2019 with information of public interest concerning the results of the evaluations conducted by ARACIS, the schedule of the external evaluation visits, information about recent developments in the Agency's activities, events organised by ARACIS or other activities such as launches of public consultations.

To enable better visibility of ARACIS's activities and facilitate access of interested persons to information of public relevance, the services of a specialised company were contracted in 2019 under the QAFIN project to develop and improve ARACIS's webpage.

National press monitoring

Furthermore, in 2019, the Direction of International Relations, Projects and Cooperation of ARACIS monitored coverage of ARACIS in the national press, and summarised the papers on higher education published in the online press, which were included in a "Press review" that was forwarded to the members of the ARACIS Council and the Experts and Speciality Inspectors, Accreditation and Quality Assurance Service.

Press releases and news

Press releases regarding the activities conducted by ARACIS were drafted and issued in 2019 to disseminate information to the Romanian public.

Information dissemination activities carried out by DRIPC also had an international component; paper proposals were sent to CEENQA to be included in the electronic bulletin that this association publishes periodically, and information regarding ARACIS's activity was sent to ENQA.

Thus, the CEENQA Newsletter of July 2019 and ENQA's News Bulletin of June 2019 included information about ARACIS's biannual publication of the Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR), and the invitation for interested people to send contributions for the Review.

CEENQA's December 2019 Newsletter included details on the participation of ARACIS as a partner in the "Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities - ESQA" Project.

Subscriptions with international publications

To communicate on the current status and the trends in quality assurance of higher education in Europe and beyond, and to disseminate its own experiences related to the quality of higher education in Romania, ARACIS uses electronic and printed means to disseminate information. Thus, in 2019, ARACIS has extended its subscriptions to *Journal of the European Higher Education Area* (RAABE publishing house) and *Quality in Higher Education* Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group publishing house).

"Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR)"

In 2019, ARACIS published two issues of the *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR)*, on the topic of "Participation of a wide category of stakeholders in ensuring the quality of higher education".

The QAR is an appreciated academic publication that focuses on aspects concerning quality assurance in the higher education system in Romania. The Review is intended as an instrument to facilitate practice sharing and communication between internal and external experts, including internationally, and contribute to promoting the development of a quality assurance culture. QAR targets the public interested in the theory, practice and policies in the aforementioned field, and contributes to the sustainability of the QUALITAS project, as shown in the information provided in the next section of this report. ARACIS enjoyed the support of the ENQA and CEENQA Secretariats to disseminate information on the possibilities and requirements for publishing papers in the QAR.

5. PROJECTS

5.1 National projects - ongoing

5.1.1 The QAFIN project

General presentation

In 2019, ARACIS continued to implement the project on *"Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating the quality standards - QAFIN"* (SIPOCA Code 16); the envisaged project period is 29.05.2017 - 28.11.2020.

The beneficiary of the QAFIN project is the Ministry of Education and Research - Unit for Management of Externally Funded Projects, and ARACIS is a project partner. The project is implemented with technical assistance from World Bank experts.

The project is co-funded from the European Social Fund (FSE) through the Administrative Capacity Operational Programme 2014 - 2020, Priority Axis 1: Efficient public administration and judicial system, Specific objective 1.1: Development and introduction of joint systems and standards in the public administration to optimise citizen- and business environment-oriented decision-making processes, in line with the Public Administration Strengthening Strategy (SCAP).

The general presentation of the QAFIN project and the materials developed and presented on ARACIS's web page, in the QAFIN project section, are described below.

Project aim

Achievement and implementation of evidence-based public policies, respectively the correlation of strategic planning with programme budgeting, in the field of financing of higher education institutions, through the enhancement of regulations regarding external quality assurance, classification and ranking of higher education institutions and study programmes. Also, the project aims at the improvement of the administrative capacity of the MEC 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 quality standards.

Specific objectives of the project

Objective A) Optimisation of strategic planning and programme budgeting by:

Objective B) Implementation of the methodology and of the guidelines for classification and ranking of higher education institutions, respectively of study programmes, based on clear and transparent sets of indicators and data.

Objective C) *Improvement of the administrative capacity of the-MEC and ARACIS at system level, by developing managerial instruments on internal organisation and operation*, procedures for internal use, manuals, guides of best practices and by training its own staff, as well as staff from higher education institutions for the implementation of the developed instruments and with regard to European practices in the field.

Expected results

Result 1 - *Methodology and guidelines for external evaluation of quality in higher education institutions from Romania.*

All the activities in preparation of the drafting of the methodology and guides have been performed, and these documents are to be finalised and approved through corresponding legislation after the publication of this report.

Result 2- *Improved methodology for the evaluation of universities with the purpose of institutional classification and ranking of study programmes. Report regarding the classification of universities and ranking of study programmes.*

The methodology was finalised, and implementation of its provisions is ongoing.

Result 3 - *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 result was achieved with the finalisation of the aforementioned Study.

Result 4 – Updated *internal Regulation for the Organisation and Operation of ARACIS* and development of the *Manual of internal procedures*.

The preliminary analysis on identifying organisational needs was drafted, and the ROF will be updated and approved, and the Manual of internal procedures developed after publication of this report.

Result 5 – Drafted *Manual of procedures regarding the role and competences of the MEC and its subordinated councils, respectively of ARACIS, regarding quality assurance and the ways of collaboration between the two institutions*.

The drafting of the aforementioned Manual is ongoing.

Result 6 - *Staff of the MEC and its subordinated councils, of ARACIS and higher education institutions trained on or aware of the implementation of the developed methodologies, including on ensuring adequate sustainability*.

Implementation of the specific activities under this result is ongoing.

Result 7 - *Staff of the MEC and ARACIS to participate in practice exchanges with other higher education quality assurance agencies listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).*

Actions were conducted in preparation of the participation of the MEC and ARACIS staff in practice exchanges, and the visits will be conducted in 2020.

The World Bank experts and experts contracted by ARACIS and the MEC produced several materials under the implemented activities.

All the materials produced and the results of the public consultations are presented on ARACIS's web page, under the QAFIN Project section - project results[1] and communications[2] sections.

5.2 National projects completed - in the sustainability-ensuring period

5.2.1 The QUALITAS project

ARACIS implemented the project „Development and strengthening of a quality culture in the Romanian higher education system - QUALITAS" (contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894), in partnership with the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). The implementation period of this project was April 2014 - December 2015.

The ***general objective*** of the QUALITAS project was quality assurance in the higher education system in Romania, by developing an organisational culture focused on continuous improvement of quality in higher education institutions, creating managerial skills at institutional and system level, which are fundamental prerequisites for improving the quality of study programmes and their relevance for the integration on the labour market and for a knowledge-based society.

The project was structured around five work packages, under which all the intended objectives were achieved and a number of publications were developed, which are available on the ARACIS web page related to the QUALITAS project: http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/.

Actions were implemented in 2019 to continue and strengthen the results of the projects and ensure sustainability; some of the measures taken to this purpose are:

- other materials developed by ARACIS were published in 2019 and contribute to ensuring the sustainability of the QUALITAS project, namely:
    - *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (Revista pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior)* – two issues published in 2019 (to be released in 2020), namely: vol. 9, no. 1 and 2, December 2019, on "Participation of a wide range of stakeholders in quality assurance in higher education";
    - *Genesis and development of higher education in Romania - statistical data* (authors: Iordan Petrescu, Emilia Gogu, Constantin Anghelache, Mădălina Gabriela Anghel).
- support provided for the organisation in 2019 of a training session for expert evaluators in the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions and three training sessions for evaluator students;
- continued collaboration with international expert evaluators selected within the QUALITAS project for the institutional evaluations carried out by ARACIS, etc.

5.2.2 ACAD-INOV project

ARACIS implemented the project „Virtual community for quality assurance and improvement of strategic and innovative management in technical and composite universities to increase the relevance

[1] http://www.aracis.ro/rezultatele-proiectului-qafin/
[2] http://www.aracis.ro/comunicate-qafin/

of higher education for the labour market (ACAD-INOV)" (contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141884), in partnership with four universities of Romania - the Politehnica University of Bucharest, the "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați, the "Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iași, the "Transilvania" University of Brașov and the company S.C. ARWEN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES S.A. (S.C. RED POINT S.A.) of Iasi. The ACAD-INOV project was implemented in April 2014 - November 2015.

The ***general objective*** of the project was to improve higher education management by developing managerial, strategic planning and communication skills in order to ensure quality of education, with a view to improving the relevance of the higher education for the labour market and the knowledge-based society.

As per the funding request, the results of the project were continued and strengthened in 2019 and the sustainability of these results was ensured.

5.3 International projects - ongoing in 2019

5.3.1 The TARGET project

General presentation

ARACIS is a partner in the project "Taking a reflexive approach on gender equality for institutional transformation – TARGET"; the project is funded from European funds under the Horizon 2020 Programme and it is coordinated by the Institute for Advanced Studies of Austria, and is implemented over a period of 48 months (1 May 2017 - 30 April 2021).

Project aim

TARGET (http://www.gendertarget.eu) takes an approach that goes beyond the formal endorsement of a gender equality plan, by enhancing an iterative reflection of the progress made, and by establishing a community of practices to achieve institutional transformation.

The project will initiate institutional change in seven gender-equality-innovating institutions within the Mediterranean area, including research organisations, research funding organisations and a network of universities.

Specific objectives of the project

ARACIS aims to contribute to the development of gender equality in Romania, with the following goals: create an educational environment addressing gender equality in the scientific/research and higher education fields; create the framework for debates, analysis and evaluation in order to plan future strategies that would lead to structural change in gender equality in our institutions; stimulate, strengthen and consolidate social links between the members of the scientific community in order to develop collective consciousness and cooperation in the fields of shared interest, with a view to becoming an agent of change in promoting gender equality.

Activities

In 2019, ARACIS organised the Third TARGET Institutional Workshop at ARACIS (11 July 2019); besides ARACIS representatives, the workshop was attended by Mrs Giovanna Vingelli, Professor at the Calabria University, Italy, specialised in Gender Studies; Mrs Alina Tăriceanu – external expert

on Gender Equality Policies, contracted by ARACIS to develop schemes for the implementation of activities on equal opportunity policies; ARACIP representatives, and representatives of students. The main activities conducted were presented and reviewed at the event, together with a preliminary proposal of the ARACIS report on the Gender Equality Plan (GEP).

Expected results

Development of the gender equality concept in the higher education of Romania, based on the tradition and experience of the project partners, boosted by the inclusion of specific standards and performance indicators in the ARACIS Methodology.

5.3.2 The DEQAR project

General presentation

The project „Database of External Quality Evaluation Reports" (DEQAR) is co-funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ Programme, *Key action 3* and it is coordinated by EQAR. Other project partners are EQAR-listed quality assurance agencies, significant European organisations (including ENQA), and a research partner; ARACIS is one of the partners.

The project's implementation period is 24 months (November 2017 – October 2019). ARACIS was active as a partner in 2019 as well.

Project aim

The aim of the project coordinated by EQAR is to develop a database to improve access to information on higher education institutions/higher education study programmes that were subject to external quality evaluations, in compliance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The participation of ARACIS in the project, as an EQAR-listed agency, is the result of the Agency's decision to contribute to the internationalisation of the Romanian higher education, by providing full information on the results of the external education quality evaluations that it conducts.

Activities

The DEQAR database is built from the ID of the higher education institutions contained in the ETER (*European Tertiary Education Register).* ETER is an initial database of European higher education institutions, still under construction, created following the initiative of the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission. ARACIS participates in the ETER as a focal point of the Ministry of Education and Research for Romania, with project management, through the representative of the European consortium implementing the ETER, from the *Universita della Svizzera Italiana*, Switzerland.

Based on the options identified at the DEQAR webinar of December 15, 2017, the first major event for all partner quality assurance agencies, ARACIS chose to forward the data to EQAR by uploading CSV/XLS files, as the ARACIS database created in Microsoft Office Access enables the data to be directly exported in Excel format.

DEQAR collects and provides direct access to the reports and decisions of all quality assurance agencies listed in the EQAR, which will contribute to the transparency of the results of external evaluations and facilitate recognition of the higher education qualifications.

The process of actually sending the reports produced following the institutional evaluations carried out in 2013-2018 started in 2018; these were the reports produced following the evaluations of Bachelor's programmes conducted in 2015-2017 and in January-February of 2018. This activity continued in 2019 and will continue in the following period as well.

During the project period, the ARACIS implementation team sent the DEQAR platform 114 reports of external institutional evaluations conducted in 2013 – 2019 and 1,416 external evaluation reports of Bachelor's study programmes conducted in 2013 – 2019.

The results of the DEQAR project were disseminated along 2019 at the training sessions organised by ARACIS.

5.3.3 The ESQA project

General presentation

The project was proposed for funding to EACEA by the Ministry of Education and Research under the Erasmus+ programme Key Action 3 – Support to Policy Reform.

The title of the project is "Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities - ESQA". The project's implementation period is 24 months (May 2019 - April 2021).

In this project, ARACIS is a partner in the consortium led by MEC as the national authority; the consortium includes three European organisations that represent quality assurance (ENQA), universities (EURASHE) and students (ESU), along four other quality assurance agencies from France, Bulgaria, Denmark and the Republic of Moldova. The project was proposed in 2018 to support the *Peer Support Group PS - C Quality Assurance* created by the *Bologna Follow-Up Group* - BFUG to respond to the requirements of the topic concerning the *Role and involvement of stakeholders in internal quality assurance*, which was identified to require additional activities and clarifications. ARACIS is represented in the PS – C by Mr Iordan Petrescu – President.

Project aim

The project concerns the way in which involvement of wider categories of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities can be increased, starting by identifying a wider definition of the concept of "stakeholders", as well as the ways in which their interest to participate in activities for quality assurance in higher education institutions could be encouraged.

Specific objectives of the project

The topic of the project is extremely relevant and topical for MEC and ARACIS, given the need to improve the quality of higher education, in correlation with the expectations of the beneficiaries, namely students, employers, and the society as a whole. ARACIS aims at extending the concept of "stakeholder" and identifying a specific way, in line with the social-economic state of facts in Romania, in which such stakeholders could be involved in the external evaluation process.

Proposed activities

The main activities are as follows: discussions with various categories of stakeholders on their expectations and involvement in external quality assurance; practice exchanges with other agencies, related to the involvement of stakeholders; a study at the level of the EHEA on the current state of play in the matter and examples of good practices; the partner agencies, including ARACIS, participate in joint mutual evaluation activities to identify the strengths and weaknesses in terms of stakeholder involvement in quality assurance; the developing and publishing of a Guideline covering the role and profile of stakeholders, and including procedures to engage them in external quality assurance, ensure good communication, training needs depending on the profile and the role of various categories of stakeholders. Each partner will analyse how the recommendations of the Guidelines on involving stakeholders can be applied in their own activities, and will be able to proceed accordingly to improve stakeholder involvement in quality assurance.

Expected results

One significant expected result is a strengthened relationship between ARACIS, higher education institutions and stakeholders, based on the experiences of other quality assurance agencies or international organisations with experience and tradition in the field, partners in the BFUG working group and in the project. Thus, in the external evaluations, ARACIS will benefit from the involvement and the professional experience of wider categories of stakeholders.

The *Peer-review activities and diagnose workshop with participation of stakeholders* was held in Bucharest on 30 October - 01 November 2019 under the ESQA project; the workshop was attended by representatives of the beneficiary and the project partners, as well as various categories of stakeholders, namely teaching staff from universities, students, employers, etc. At this event, attendants looked at how these stakeholders are involved in quality assurance procedures; furthermore, means were identified to increase their future involvement and contribution in quality assurance activities, and a shared vision on the role of stakeholders in improving quality assurance processes was defined.

Continuing the discussions conducted in Bucharest, the second *Peer-review activities and diagnose workshop with participation of stakeholders* was held on 02-04 December 2019 in Copenhagen.

ARACIS was actively involved in providing the necessary data, requested through a questionnaire, as a member agency and a project partner, to support ENQA in conducting a *Study related to stakeholders' involvement in quality assurance activities.*

6. SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ARACIS in 2019

1. The current activity continued in compliance with the regulations in force with a view to carrying out the Agency's mission. ***11*** institutional evaluations were completed in 2019 - 2 more than in the previous year - resulting in five "High degree of confidence" judgments, three "Confidence" judgments, two "Limited degree of confidence" judgments and one "Lack of confidence" judgment. Compared to 2018, the number of "High degree of confidence" and "Confidence"

judgments awarded was the same, but in three of these evaluations, the judgments revealed deficiencies in terms of internal quality assurance at those institutions.

Furthermore, ***393*** Bachelor's programmes were evaluated, out of which 71 within institutional evaluations, in all forms of education (full time, part-time and distance education). The number of evaluations of Bachelor's programmes finalised with a "Confidence" judgment is ***379,*** namely 96.44%.

Evaluations of study programmes finalised with the same judgment make for 92.3% in 2014; 93.37% in 2015; 86.5% in 2016; 95% in 2017 (according to the Self-assessment report presented by the Agency for the external evaluation coordinated by ENQA), and 93.7% in 2018. The conclusion can be maintained that the quality of the study programmes evaluated by ARACIS remains relatively constant, with variations around the average percentage of 92.88%, recalculated for the period of 2013-2019, when 2.427 Bachelor's programmes were evaluated.

2. The recommendations and observations contained in the ENQA Report (2018) started to be implemented: the ARACIS strategy for 2018 – 2021, published on the Agency's web page (https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Strategia_ARACIS_pentru_2018-2021_-_Final_28.01.20191.pdf) was the document based on which the actions and measures taken by the Agency were decided. Activities continued in 2019 with a view to developing the Agency's new site under the QAFIN project, finalised in the first part of 2020. The Agency's reports are published on the web page in a searchable format.

3. Based on the observations and recommendations of the ENAEE, formulated on the occasion of the second external evaluation visit at the Agency, the Bachelor's programmes in Engineering Sciences that applied for EUR-ACE® Label were evaluated according to all ENAEE evaluation standards.

4. The EQAR evaluation was successfully completed in 2019 based on the documents submitted by ARACIS; thus, the Agency continues to be registered in the Register for another five-year period.

5. Implementation of measures for internal quality assurance continued:

   - approved format and manner of receiving the feedback questionnaire from the institutions evaluated by ARACIS; One element that needs to be better regulated and improved is the manner of processing and using the information received in the questionnaires from the universities as feedback on ARACIS's evaluation activities.

   - drafted and approved internal system and operational procedures. Implementation of the provisions of the internal system and operational procedures continued, and it remains a constant activity, as it is a major component of the internal quality assurance system;

   - activities continued under the projects where ARACIS is a partner, in order to improve and supplement the external evaluation procedures; one priority action along this year was (and will continue to be in 2020) the completion of regulations and guidelines for the evaluation of doctoral studies, and initiation of the evaluation activity for this third higher education cycle.

   - participation in the ESQA project as a partner of MEC, the aim of which was a more sustained engagement of stakeholders in quality assurance activities; the data provided by

ARACIS, requested through a questionnaire, contributed to ENQA's *Study related to stakeholders' involvement in quality assurance activities,* which will be completed in 2020;

- ARACIS continued to successfully implement the provisions of the Project of the Ministry of Education and Research - Management Unit for Externally Funded Projects - on *"Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating quality standards" (QAFIN)*.

6. The structure of the permanent staff in the Agency's internal directions and services did not change in terms of the number and the people employed, even though this remains a necessity in some compartments.
7. The financial activity of the Agency was appropriate and supported its mission. Continued analysis of evaluation costs and re-correlation with salary increases and other measures to keep up with the changes in the law continue to be necessary.
8. The enhanced international visibility of the Agency contributes to connecting the Romanian higher education to the EHEA by:

   - participation in the European Commission's DEQAR project;

   - election of Professor Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Vice-president of ARACIS, as the ENQA Vice-president; Mrs Ghițulică also continued her mandate as a CEENQA President;

   - continued publication of the QAR, which contains contributions of authors from Romania and from other countries;

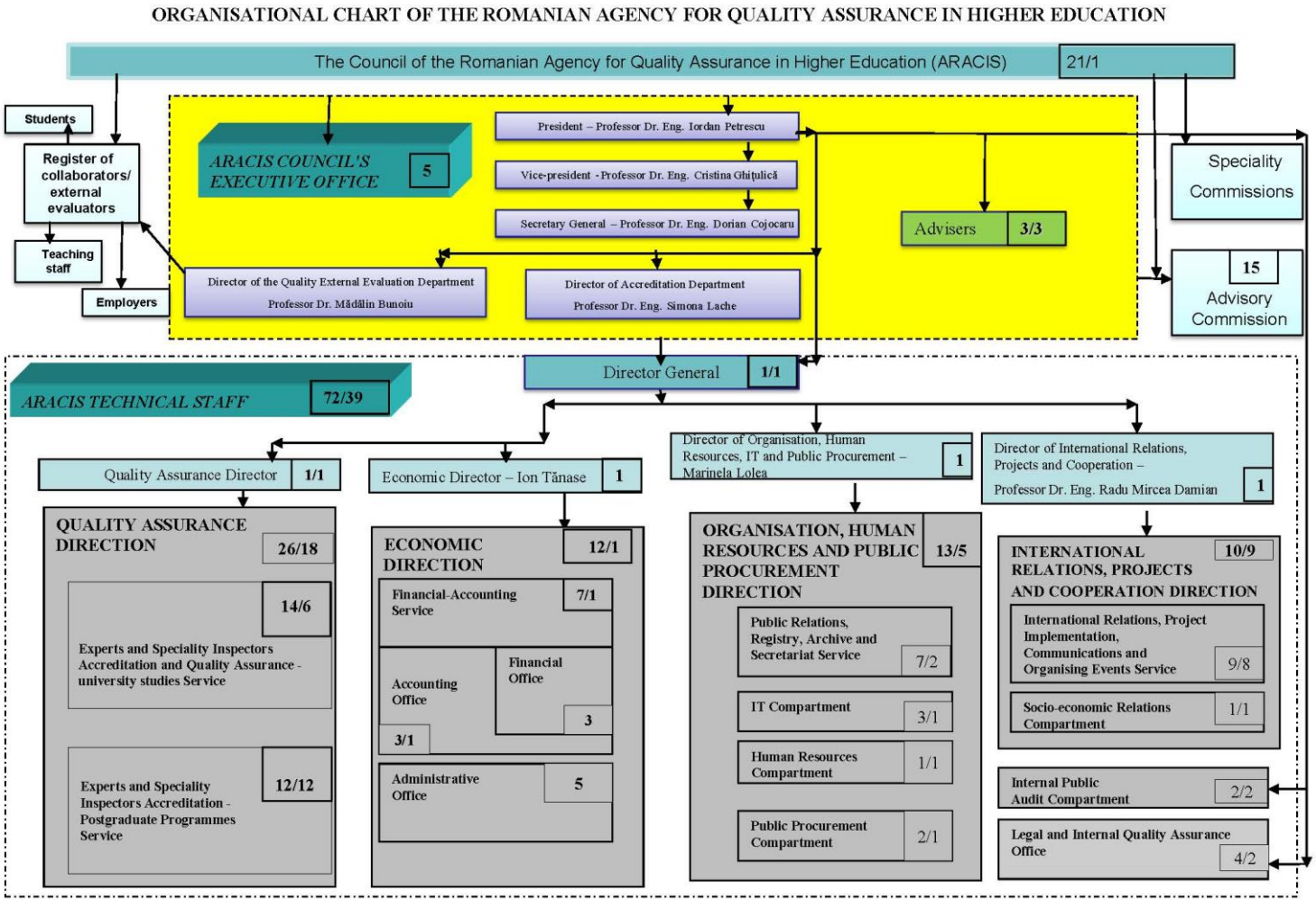
   - publication of comprehensive works on the higher education in Romania, including in English.

It is appropriate to mention that the quality of ARACIS's activity has improved in 2019 based on the measures taken by the Agency and the inclusion of the ENQA and EQAR recommendations; this is a trend that remains constant, in line with the requests and aspirations that all stakeholders have in connection with quality assurance in higher education.

The ARACIS Strategy is available at the following web address:
https://www.aracis.ro/en/strategy/

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – ARACIS organisational structure



Appendix 2 – Members of the ARACIS Council (2019)

President:

1. Professor Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu

Vice-President:

2. Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică

Secretary General:

3. Professor Dr. Eng. Dorian Cojocaru

Head of the External Quality Evaluation Department:

4. Associate Professor Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu

Head of the Accreditation Department:

5. Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache

Members:

6. Professor Dr. Nicoleta Corbu
7. Professor Dr. Gheorghe Grigoraş
8. Professor Dr. Eng. Anton Hadăr
9. Professor Dr. Ioan Ianoș
10. Professor Dr. Iamandi Luca
11. Professor Dr. Ioan Lascăr
12. Professor Dr. Ladislau Nagy
13. Professor Dr. Nicolae-Adrian Opre
14. Professor Dr. Radu Nicolaie Oprean
15. Professor Dr. Ion Popa
16. Professor Dr. Eng. Neculai Eugen Seghedin
17. Professor Dr. Eng. Vasilica Stan
18. Doctor in Engineering Romeo-Cristian Erbașu
19. Vlad-Valentin Dediu – student
20. Petrișor-Laurențiu Țucă – student

Appendix 3 – ARACIS Advisory Board

Academician Ionel Haiduc

Prof. Dinu Airinei - "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi

Prof. Cezar Bîrzea - National School for Political and Administrative Studies of Bucharest

Prof. Oprea Călin – „Nicolae Titulescu" University of Bucharest

Prof. Dumitru Gaşpar – "Universitatea de Vest" of Timisoara

Prof. Viorel Lefter – Academy for Economic Sciences of Bucharest

Prof. Mircea Cristel Muthu – „Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Prof. Gheorghe Popa - "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi

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