



Approved in the ARACIS Council meeting of 30 July 2020

Guidelines on the evaluation of higher education study programmes / domains in a blended procedure format

Scope: provisional authorisation to operate procedures, accreditation procedures, periodical evaluation of bachelor's study programmes and of master's study domains and master's study programmes during the state of emergency, the state of alert and until the line authorities lift the restrictions on public meetings.

The activities, stages and methodology regarding the accreditation and periodical evaluation procedures for higher education study programmes / domains are laid down in the Government's Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on quality assurance in education, approved by Law no. 87/2006, as subsequently amended and supplemented; Decision no. 915 of 14 December 2017 on the Methodology for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference, and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and in line with the Guidelines of activities for quality evaluation in higher education study programmes and higher education institutions, developed by ARACIS.

Within the epidemiological context created by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, the external evaluation for provisional authorisation to operate, accreditation and periodical evaluation procedures can be conducted in a blended format; this manner of working combines a preliminary review of the internal evaluation documents; identifying the aspects that require a face-to-face visit and the carrying out of the visit at the requesting institution, with the purpose of checking compliance with standards; using synchronous remote visual communication means for the meetings of the members of the expert evaluators commissions, the meetings with various stakeholders and any online visits to any units where access is restricted or difficult during the visit, and finalising the external evaluation documents remotely, using synchronous or asynchronous communication means.

Methodological stages:

1. ARACIS receives the external evaluation request and approves the membership of the expert evaluators commission.
2. The higher education institution is informed in writing about the intention to conduct the evaluation in a blended format, and the consent of the institution is requested. To this purpose, the speciality inspector in charge of the Speciality Commission pertaining to the scientific domain of the envisaged study programme / domain shall inform the requesting higher education institution.
3. After receiving the written agreement of the higher education institution, the coordinator of the expert evaluators commission for the evaluation of the study programmes/domains contacts



the person appointed by the requesting higher education institution to be in charge with the evaluation, and they will agree on the details for the operationalisation of all the required stages for conducting the evaluation remotely, via synchronous visual communication means, and conducting a face-to-face verification visit. For the meetings that will take place at the requesting higher education institution, the institution undertakes to organise these while complying with all the hygiene measures in force (including by providing masks, disinfectants and gloves for the participants).

4. The coordinator of the expert evaluators commission and the person in charge with the evaluation appointed by the requesting higher education institution shall establish a schedule of the stages of the evaluation, per days and hours, including the period of the face-to-face visit at the institution and the interviews with various stakeholders, which will be conducted remotely via synchronous visual communication means. The evaluation schedule is a document that will be enclosed to the Visit Sheet.

5. The evaluation visit conducted in a blended format shall be conducted during the scheduled period, agreed by all the members of the expert evaluators team and the requesting higher education institution, and will have the same duration as the face-to-face visit. Depending on the complexity of the evaluation process, the duration of the evaluation may be extended by 1-2 days.

6. The higher education institution shall set up a virtual workspace, on its own server or in a cloud, further on referred to as the virtual classroom, which shall be accessible to the members of the evaluation commissions appointed by the ARACIS Council and the staff appointed by the university, based on usernames and passwords. All the documents of the internal evaluation file and the pertaining annexes shall be uploaded to this virtual classroom, and the links to other additional resources needed by the commission to complete the evaluation (topics for the ongoing evaluation, projects, bachelor papers/dissertations, etc.) and the links for the remote interviews organised via synchronous visual communication means shall be posted in the virtual classroom.

7. If the evaluated institution does not have the technical possibility to set up the virtual classroom or organise the remote interviews via synchronous visual communication means during the evaluation visit, these shall be hosted by ARACIS with assistance from the IT Compartment.

8. Based on the documents uploaded in the virtual classroom, the members of the evaluation commissions shall start to fill in the Evaluation report (Visit Sheet) and identify the elements that need to be checked by visiting the requesting institution. Depending on the complexity of the visit to be conducted face-to-face, the evaluation commission shall appoint one or two of its members who will conduct the visit at the institution. To reduce the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus by direct contact, the visit at the evaluated institution will be scheduled to last one



day, and may be extended in well documented circumstances, with the approval of the BEX of the ARACIS Council.

9. Wherever this is possible, the visits to the teaching venues and the laboratories of the evaluated institutions and the demonstrations of the operation of equipment and software that is relevant for the teaching and the research process, the visits to the institution's library, the secretariats or the financial-accounting and administrative departments, the research venues, the students' sports facilities etc. shall be conducted face to face.

10. If, for any reasons presented in advance by the evaluated institution, during the period while the online evaluation visit is conducted, the appointed members of the evaluation commission do not have access to some of the venues mentioned above for the face-to-face verification, the institution shall present a detailed report on how the equipment and the software in the laboratories are used in the teaching process pertaining to the evaluated study programme, and how these contribute to reinforcing the results of the learning process. The report shall be accompanied by a film presenting the equipment and the software products that exist in the university's laboratories, with explanations on how they work and how they are operated.

If, for various reasons, during the period of the evaluation visit, the appointed members of the evaluation commission have no access to the library or the administrative structures, the members of the expert evaluators commission shall request a live video presentation of these venues, as well as remote interviews with the representatives of these structures to be organised via synchronous visual communication means.

11. During the face-to-face evaluation visit, as well as before and after the visit, the members of the expert evaluators commission shall attend documentation sessions, sessions for reviewing any additional documents, filling in the Visit Sheet, discussing and exchanging information, etc.; such sessions shall be conducted remotely using synchronous or asynchronous communication means, and will be organised by the coordinator of the evaluation commission, with assistance from the ARACIS IT Compartment.

12. At the end of the evaluation, the members of the expert evaluators commission shall have a video conference meeting with the representatives of the higher education institution, in which they will present the main findings from the evaluation, as well as any recommendations for quality improvement.

13. All remote meetings organised using synchronous visual communication means shall be recorded after receiving the consent of the attendants, and saved in the ARACIS cloud. Remote meetings with the students of the higher education institution shall be organised by the coordinator of the expert evaluators commission with assistance from the ARACIS IT Compartment, and the recordings of these meetings will only be saved in the ARACIS cloud.

14. The report of the expert evaluators commission shall be accompanied by the recordings of the interviews and discussions held during the remote evaluation.