

## Guidelines on conducting online external evaluation visits during the period of the state of alert caused by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus

The activities, stages and methodology related to the accreditation and periodical evaluation of higher education institutions and, respectively, higher education programmes/study domains are laid down in Government's Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on ensuring the quality of education, approved by Law no. 87/2006, as subsequently amended and supplemented; Decision no. 915 of 14 December 2017 on amending the annex to Government Decision no. 1.418/2006 to approve Methodology for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference, and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education; the Order of the minister of education and research no. 3200 of 7 February 2020 concerning the Methodology for the evaluation of doctoral studies and the systems of criteria, standards and performance indicators, and in line with the Guidelines of activities for quality evaluation in higher education study programmes and higher education institutions, developed by ARACIS (the Guidelines).

In the circumstances laid down in *Emergency Ordinance no. 70 of 14 May 2020 on regulating some measures, as of 15 May 2020, related to the context of the epidemiological situation caused by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, for extending some deadlines, modifying and amending Law no. 227/2015 - the Fiscal Code, the Law on national education no. 1/2011 and other normative documents*, visits conducted at the requesting institutions within the provisional authorisation to operate and accreditation procedures to check compliance with the standards may also be performed **by correspondence and by working online**.

In order to perform verification visits **online**, the specific nature of this way of working must be considered, as it involves substantial direct remote interaction between the members of the evaluation commission, the commission coordinator, and the person in charge assigned by the evaluated institution, in order to thoroughly prepare all the phases of the evaluation, the virtual online visits, the video-conference interviews, and the uploading of the additional documents requested by the commission in the virtual environment.

In line with the provisions of the ARACIS Guidelines, the following shall be considered when conducting verification visits **online**:

1. In the case of evaluation requests filed with ARACIS before the adoption of Government Emergency Ordinance 70/2020, **the institution shall be informed in writing about the intention to conduct the evaluation visit in an online format, and the consent of the institution shall be requested**. To this purpose, the speciality inspector in charge with the Speciality Commission related to the scientific domain of the envisaged study programme / domain or the technical secretary of the institutional evaluation commission shall inform the requesting higher education institution.
2. After obtaining the written agreement sent by the education provider, the coordinator of the expert evaluators commission set up for the evaluation of the study programmes / domains, respectively the coordinator and the technical secretary of the expert evaluators commission in the case of the institutional evaluation shall contact the person appointed by the requesting higher education



institution to be in charge with the evaluation, and they will agree together on the **details regarding the operationalisation of all the stages required for conducting the verification visit by correspondence and in an online format.**

3. The higher education institution shall create a **virtual workspace** on its own server or in a cloud, further on referred to as a *classroom*. This *classroom* 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. This *classroom* is where all the documents of the internal evaluation files and their pertaining annexes shall be uploaded and the links to other additional resources that the commission would need for performing the online evaluation, as well as the links for the virtual visits and/or video conferences posted.
4. The **meetings** scheduled with the representatives of the requesting higher education institution, the staff of the various administrative departments, students, teaching staff, employers, and graduates shall be conducted in a *video conference* format and organised by the staff appointed by the evaluated institution, in agreement with the expert evaluators commission. The *video conference* platform to be used shall be decided by mutual agreement for each meeting or interview; the link of the meeting shall be posted in the virtual classroom, and individual messages shall be sent to inform the participants. The representatives of the institution shall not attend the *video conference* meetings with the students, graduates and employers.
5. If the evaluated institution does not have the technical possibility to set up the *virtual classroom* or the *video conferences* required for the online evaluation visit, these shall be hosted by ARACIS with assistance from the IT Compartment.
6. The *online* evaluation visit 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 a face-to-face visit.
7. During the *online* evaluation visit, as well as before and after the verification visit, the members of the expert evaluators commission shall meet in documentation sessions, sessions for reviewing any additional documents, filling in the Visit Sheet, discussing and exchanging information, etc.; such sessions shall be conducted as *video conferences* organised by the coordinator of the evaluation commission, with assistance from the ARACIS IT Compartment.
8. The visits to the **teaching venues and the laboratories** of the evaluated institution and the demonstrations of the equipment and software that is relevant for the teaching and research process shall be conducted in a *synchronous online / virtual format*.

If, for any reasons, during the period while the *online* evaluation visit is conducted, the representatives of the education provider do not have access to the venues mentioned above and cannot provide live video communication with the expert evaluators commission, 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. Such 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.



9. The visit of the expert evaluators commission at the institution's **library**, at the financial-accounting and the administrative **departments**, in the **students' hostels, canteens and sports facilities**, etc. shall be conducted *online in a virtual format*, and will be accompanied by interviews with the representatives of these structures.  
If, for any reasons, during the period when the evaluation visit is conducted, the representatives of the higher education institution have no access to these spaces, the members of the expert evaluators commission shall request *video conferences* to be organised in order to have interviews with the representatives of these structures.
10. Any *virtual online* visit at the faculties, departments, administrative structures, classrooms that have adequate equipment for the use of IT technologies in teaching etc., requested by the expert evaluators commission, which, for any reasons, cannot be conducted shall be replaced by *video conferences* in which members of the management teams of these structures shall be interviewed.
11. At the end of the *online* verification visit, the members of the expert evaluators commission shall have a *video conference* meeting with the representatives of the higher education institution, where they will present the **main findings of the evaluation and the recommendations** for quality improvement.
12. All meetings conducted in *video conference format* and all *online virtual visits* shall be recorded after getting the consent of the participants at the meeting, and saved in the *virtual classroom*. *Video conference* 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.
13. The report of the expert evaluators commission shall be accompanied by the **recordings of the online virtual visits and the interviews** conducted in the *video conferences*, which will be downloaded from the virtual classroom.