Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Activity Report

Year 2020

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

A	Accreditation
ACAD-INOV	Project "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	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova
ANC	National Qualifications Authority
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 -BFUG
CE	Ethics Commission
CM	Monitoring Commission
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CNATDCU	National Council for Attestation of University Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates
DAI	Danish Accreditation Institution
DEQAR	Project "The Database of External Quality Assurance Results"
DRIPC	International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Direction
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual 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 "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	Romanian Government Decision
GEO	Romanian Government's Emergency Ordinance
GO	Romanian Government Ordinance
HCÉRES	High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
LC	EUR-ACE Label Committee
LEN	National Education Law
ME	Ministry of Education
MoESR	Ministry of Education and Scientific Research
M. Of.	Official Gazette of Romania
NEEA	National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency – Bulgaria

OGSG	Order of the Government's Secretariat General
OME	Order of the Minister of Education
OMESR	Order of the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research
QAFIN	Project "Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating the quality standards"
QAN	Quality Audit Network
QAR	Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education
QUALITAS	Project "Development and strengthening of a quality culture in the Romanian higher education system"
REI	ARACIS Register of International Evaluators
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 "Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation"
UEFISCDI	Executive Unit for the Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation
UNSR	National Union of Students in Romania
USR	Romanian Students' Union

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Like in the previous years, the 2020 Activity Report of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) is completed in the first part of the subsequent calendar year, to provide checked data and a full picture of the activities performed during the reporting year. However, I cannot talk about these activities before mentioning that, in 2020, our country, as well as all humanity, has lived through dramatic times caused by the pandemic, which continue even at this moment.

Therefore, in 2020, some of the evaluation and operating procedures of the Agency have been affected by the legal measures implemented to protect the population, among which social distancing measures and the restrictions on people's movement have had and continue to create multiple effects. Steps have already been taken in this respect, which were designed as temporary steps waiting for the moment when we hope that things will get back to normal. However, the restriction period extended beyond the initial estimations, and normality - regained, we hope - might be quite different from what we once knew.

The actions taken by the Agency, with the support of the Ministry of Education and of the Romanian Government, allowed ARACIS to accomplish its mission in 2020 as well, in line with the provisions of the laws in force regarding quality assurance in higher education in Romania.

Briefly, the main modifications of procedure were aimed at ensuring compliance with the primary legislation, which explicitly stipulates evaluation visits to higher education institutions. Since August 2020, evaluations for accreditation could be conducted online, and periodical evaluations could be rescheduled, within the limits of a one-year extension from the deadline established according to the law.

Furthermore, for the periodical evaluations, hybrid evaluations were organised as well, whenever the members of the evaluation panels identified an opportunity to eliminate certain unclear aspects by visiting the locations, or within the higher education study programmes that imply key practical aspects for training the students for the profession, such as in the medical field, for instance.

The meetings of the evaluation panels and of the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions were conducted online, using, as applicable, brief video recordings showing the facilities and equipment of the visited institution, and all data was made available to all members of the visiting panel in a dedicated cloud, accessible with a password. I deem that, irrespective of the reasons that caused this fortuitous physical distancing of the evaluators from the evaluated institution, some of the new procedures can be kept and implemented in the future as well, as they resulted in the development of better cooperation and communication mechanisms between evaluators, including with the international evaluators involved in institutional evaluation.

According to the tradition and in line with the legal obligations, 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, as an agency registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), and as a partner in several projects implemented with national and international funds.

Out of the six institutional evaluations in public and private higher education institutions, for which the reports were completed in 2020, two were completed with "High degree of confidence" judgments, three with "Confidence" judgments, and one with "Limited confidence" judgment. The report gives a detailed presentation of the evaluations of Bachelor's and Master's higher education study programmes, and of the evaluations of Master's study domains.

ARACIS continued the preparatory work in 2020 to initiate evaluation of the third cycle of higher education studies - doctoral studies; more information on this is given further in the report.

The students' engagement in the activity of Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions, their participation in the external evaluation visits for the evaluation of study programmes, Master's study domains, and institutional evaluation was permanent.

ARACIS continued to issue publications on the higher education and the external evaluation of the quality of education in 2020 as well.

Three papers were proposed for publication in 2020, in print and in electronic form, due for release in January 2021, 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. Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică continued to exercise her mandates as President of the regional international organisation CEENQA and Vice-president of ENQA.

Strengthening of the positive results of the external evaluation of ARACIS in 2018, completed in 2019, has begun with the implementation of a set of measures responding to ENQA and EQAR's observations and proposals to improve the Agency's 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.

I mention that, under the laws established to reduce the effects of the pandemic, some of the current activities of the Agency's technical staff were carried out both in person at the institution and by remote work, using electronic communication means.

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 2021 and beyond, 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/misiune/)

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 strategies and policies to the Ministry of Education (ME) in order to continuously improve the quality of higher education, closely correlated to the level of pre-university education.

FOREWORD

This report covers the activities carried out by ARACIS in the period between 03.01.2020 – 31.12.2020.

The report was drafted and finalised by a group coordinated by the International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Direction (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 - Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office; Marinela Lolea - Organisation, Human Resources, IT and Public Procurement Direction.

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 Quality External Evaluation Department; Professor Dr. Eng. Dorian Cojocaru, Secretary General of the ARACIS Council; students Costel Marian Dalban and Horia Șerban Onița, 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, DRIPC; Adina Nică, Expert, DRIPC.

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

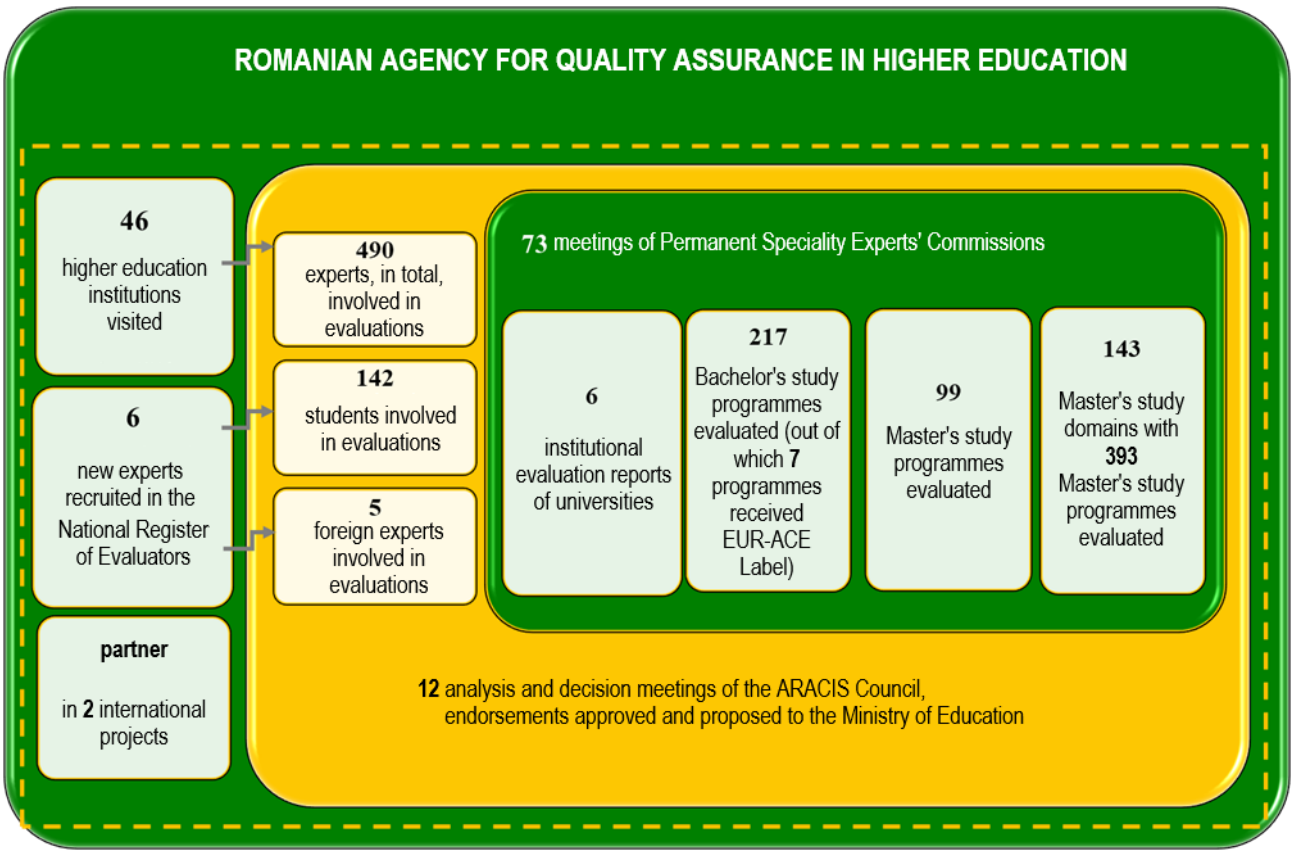
The report was presented and approved in the ARACIS Council.

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

ARACIS ACTIVITY REPORT FOR YEAR 2020

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 2020, 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 2020 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 *Methodology for evaluation*) 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 (**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):

- *Romanian Government's Emergency Ordinance (GEO) no. 75/2005 on quality assurance of education, as subsequently amended and supplemented;*
- *Romanian Government Decision (GD) no. 915/2017 modifying the appendix to Decision no. 1418/2006 approving the Methodology for external evaluation, 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 Master's study domains based on the accredited Master's programmes;*
- *Orders of the Minister of Education* 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 of higher education programmes and higher education institutions*;
- *Guidelines for the periodical external evaluation of the study subjects of Master's study domains;*
- *Code of ethics and rules of 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 *Methodology for external evaluation, 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, based on its own assessments materialising its know-how/experience in the field; therefore, the ARACIS Guidelines and its appendixes 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 - European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 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 2020, several punctual modifications of the *Specific standards for the external evaluation of the academic quality of Bachelor's and Master's programmes* of the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions.

Concerning the **evaluation of doctoral studies**, the *Methodology for evaluation of doctoral studies and systems of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation* was approved by Order of the Minister of Education (OME) no. 3200, repealing OME no. 3200/ 2019 and creating an enabling framework for the development of the Guidelines and other support documents needed for conducting external evaluation activities for doctoral schools.

As a result, the ARACIS Council developed and approved the Guidelines for carrying out the periodical external evaluation of doctoral study domains and the Guidelines for carrying out the periodical external evaluation of doctoral schools, as well as the template Structure of the internal evaluation report, available on the Agency's website.

Other support documents will be finalised in the first part of 2021, including proposals regarding the tariffs for the external evaluation of doctoral studies, so that the external evaluation process can be initiated and conducted during 2021, as the deadline for accreditation of doctoral schools is 31 December 2021. Given the date of completion of this Report, April 2021, we mention that the actual external evaluation of the third higher education cycle - doctoral studies - will be conducted as provided by Emergency Ordinance 22/2021 on modifying and supplementing the National Education Law no. 1/2011 and Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on quality assurance of education, and by the subsequent documents which are currently being developed and pending approval and will be published on the Agency's webpage.

Significant progress was achieved in 2020 in the process of external evaluation of **Master's study programmes in teaching**. Thus, *OME no. 4524/ 2020 on setting up Master's study programmes in teaching* was approved, and based on this Order, the ARACIS Council drafted and approved the Specific standards for this type of external evaluation.

Once the legal framework was created, the external evaluation of Master's programmes in teaching was performed, and the ARACIS Council validated 41 Master's study programmes.

Furthermore, ARACIS worked to adapt its activities to the new pandemic context generated by the SARS-CoV-2 virus; to this purpose, in line with the laws in force, it has developed and approved **the Guidelines based on which the external evaluation processes can be conducted in blended format** and external evaluations were performed for higher education studies/institutions.

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 provided by higher education institutions and education providers operating on the territory of Romania and by Romanian education providers 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 providers 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 provided by higher education institutions;

d) propose strategies and policies to the line ministry (Ministry of Education) in order to continuously improve the quality of higher education, in close correlation with the pre-university education, the requests of employers and the 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. 22 of 30/04/2020.

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

- the Council;

- the Executive Board of the Council;
- the Quality External Evaluation Department;
- the Accreditation Department;
- the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions;
- the Advisory Commission;
- the Ethics Commission;
- the Technical Structure, organised on four speciality directions:
  - Quality Assurance Direction;
  - Economic Direction;
  - Organisation, IT, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction;
  - International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Direction.
- 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 (2020)*).

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).

The two students, representatives of the student federations, were validated in the ARACIS Council in October 2020, 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 (M.Of.) 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 Quality External 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 attend the BEx periodical meetings as guests.

The ***Quality External 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 Commission*** 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 Commission*).

The Ethics Commission of ARACIS assures compliance with the *Code of ethics and rules of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS in assuring and evaluating the quality of higher education in Romania.* 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.

The Disciplinary Commission is a standing commission, according to Council Decision no. 147/19.12.2019, and is composed of **three** members (out of which **two** members of the ARACIS Council and **one** member of the technical structure of ARACIS) and assisted by one non-voting secretary of 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 ***13*** *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.

Based on the Decision of the ARACIS Council, the selection of students to sit on the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions of ARACIS was conducted in October 2020, and the students' representatives were selected for each of the 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 2020.

The individual employment contracts of **two** employees of the technical structure ended in 2020 by agreement of the parties, and one employee was relocated for a specific period from the National Qualifications Authority (ANC) to ARACIS.

Six vacancies, to be staffed through public contests, were advertised in March 2020. However, according to the provisions of the law, the contests were suspended during the state of alert, as a result of the pandemic situation generated by COVID-19.

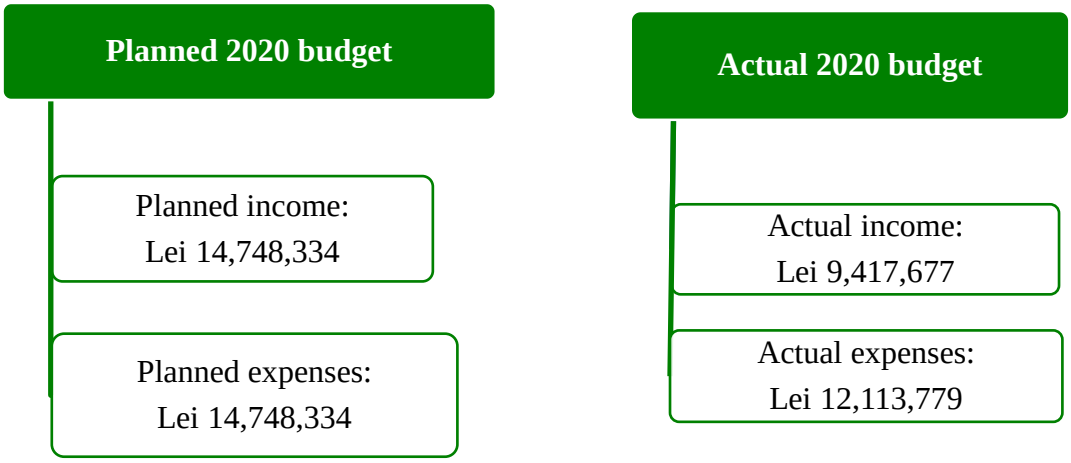
1.1.5. The financial activity of ARACIS

According to the laws in force, the revenues of ARACIS are generated from internal sources, such as fees for the external evaluation activities for provisional authorizing to operate/ accreditation and/ or periodical evaluation of 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 2020, the ARACIS Council approved an income and expenditure budget of Lei 14,748,334 for both incomes and expenditure (*Figure 1*), out of which Lei 5,530,000 incomes and Lei 4,060,000 for expenses under projects funded from FEN.

As of December 31, 2020, the revenues collected by ARACIS were Lei 9,417,677, out of which Lei 1,519,527 from FEN, while actual payments amounted to Lei 12,113,779, out of which Lei 2,636,095 from projects funded from FEN.

Figure 1 **– ARACIS income and expenditure budget for year 2020**



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

As the data presented above indicate, an amount of Lei 5,330,657 of the incomes was not realised, out of which Lei 1,520,184 pertaining to the basic activity and Lei 3,810,473 pertaining to the FEN-funded activity, and Lei 70,664 capital expenditure not realised; furthermore, an amount of Lei 2,634,555 of the expenses was not realised, out of which Lei 1,210,650 pertaining to the basic activity and Lei 1,423,905 pertaining to the FEN-funded activity. The differences concerning the realisation of incomes and expenditure related to the basic activity compared to the planned values comes from a reduced number of evaluation contracts concluded with higher education institutions, mainly due to

the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, as a result of which some of the evaluation activities in higher education institutions could no longer be carried out. 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, 2020 indicate that the funds were managed properly during 2020, according to the law, given the actual circumstances described above.

1.1.6. The juridical activity of ARACIS

In 2020, as a result of the evaluation missions conducted and of the enforcement of all legal procedures for decision making and granting of marks, 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 six court cases. The defence pleas were formulated for all cases, de jure and de facto, by drafting denials of claims and enclosing supporting documents. Up to now, all the cases on the docket of the courts for which trial was held were won by ARACIS.

The evaluation activities conducted in 2020 required a significant number of experts to be involved; therefore, 1,285 quality evaluation contracts were concluded with expert evaluators during the year.

18 Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and 86 ARACIS Council Resolutions were drafted for year 2020, pertaining to various circumstances and cases. All the Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and all Council Resolutions have undergone the internal transparency, communication, 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 2020, 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 rules 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 (EC) 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 29.10.2020.

The Ethics Commission is assisted by a legal adviser who approves 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 Commission 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, an *Intimation* was registered in 2020 for the Ethics Committee, concerning the conduct of a member of the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators - Students (RNE-S).

The ARACIS management notified the Ethics Commission, which then pursued all the stages set forth in the Code of Ethics. The suspicion of infringement under the provisions of the Code of Ethics concerned a member of the REN-S who allegedly used internal documents of a university, not intended for publication, to denigrate the institution and its management.

The Ethics Commission reviewed the existing documentary evidence and concluded that there had been no infringement of the provisions of the Code of Ethics and the norms of professional conduct of ARACIS. 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 the decision was 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 ongoing 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, 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.

One procedure was revised in the Agency in 2020 and **nine procedures** were developed, which results in **56 documented procedures (operational and system procedures)** available in the Agency, concerning the internal activities developed by the organisational structures within the Agency.

In 2020, the ARACIS management continued to improve the managerial internal control system, as per the provisions of GO no. 119/1999 on managerial internal control and preventive financial control, reissued with its subsequent modifications and provisions, and the provisions of the Order of the GSG no. 600/2018 to approve the Managerial internal control code 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 SCIM at the level of the internal structures and at Agency level;
- data submitted by the organisational structures within ARACIS were recorded, centralised and processed;
- the Managerial internal control system development programme of ARACIS was drafted;
- meetings of the Monitoring Commission were organised and prepared;
- protocols, minutes of the meetings and Decisions of the Monitoring Commission were drafted;
- technical support was provided for the development of the internal control system;
- 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 was drafted.

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.

Similar to the previous years, year 2020 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 April 2020, the ARACIS Council revised the *Agency's Organising and Operating Regulations.*

In 2020, an employee of the Organisation, IT, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction – Public Relations, Registry, Archive and Secretariat Service attended the training course on "Communication in the public sector. Document management and decision-making transparency", with the aim to develop know-how and practical skills to properly carry out the tasks of the officer in charge with the management of evaluation documents, as well as the tasks concerning access to information of public interest, as per *Law no. 544/2001 concerning access to information of public interest, as subsequently amended and supplemented.*

1.1.8. Activity of the Public Internal Audit Compartment at ARACIS

There are two vacancies in the Public Internal Audit Compartment, for which a contest was organised in March 2020; the contest is still suspended, in line with the provisions of the law.

No public internal audit missions were organised at the Agency in 2020.

1.2 Summary of activities

Management of current activities

During 2020, 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.

Two complaints were submitted during the period covered by the report regarding the evaluation of higher education study programmes, out of which one was resolved, and one rejected, as it was not submitted within the deadline provided by the regulations in force.

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 2020 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 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 continuing the dialogue relevant to the educational system in Romania.

All these activities are supported under the project "Actual involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities" - ESQA, funded by the European Commission, where ARACIS is a partner agency; the project is described at Section 5 of this report.

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 both in the ARACIS Council and in the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions; they attend the meetings of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council, and participate in all evaluations (institutional evaluations; evaluations Master study domains; evaluations of higher education study programmes) carried out by the Agency.

In 2020, given the situation created by the pandemic, specific training sessions for students could not be organised.

Based on the information received from students' federations regarding continuation of the student status, the Register National Register of Evaluators – Students (RNE-S) was updated in 2020. 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 2020 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 2020. 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 Methodology for external evaluation 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 2021, provides additional support in improving the quality of internal and external quality assurance processes.

2.1 Evaluations conducted by ARACIS in 2020

2.1.1 Evaluation of study programmes

In 2020, ARACIS received **269** requests for external quality evaluation services from universities for Bachelor's and Master's programmes, and **ten** requests for evaluation of the Psycho-pedagogical Training Programme for certification of skills for the teaching profession.

15 higher education institutions approached the Agency with requests for the periodical external evaluation of **59** Master's study domains.

Furthermore, **15** 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 (AP), accreditation (A) or periodical evaluation (EP) (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 2020. Most of the evaluation activities were for accredited study programmes, evaluated periodically to maintain their accreditation. 18.90% of the evaluated programmes were new programmes proposed for provisional operation authorisation. 4.9% 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 (94%) obtained an approval to maintain their accreditation with a "Confidence" judgment, and 92.31% of those that were evaluated for accreditation obtained accreditation.

Table 2.1.1.1 Report on BACHELOR'S programmes evaluated in 2020 per type of evaluation (AP/ A/ EP)

Authorisation - Bachelor's programmes – total = 41
Accreditation - Bachelor's programmes – total = 26
Periodical evaluation - Bachelor's programmes – total = 150
} ***TOTAL = 217***

Table 2.1.1.2 Report on BACHELOR'S programmes evaluated in 2020 per judgment awarded

Bachelor's programmes evaluated in 2020 – 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
36	-	2	20	3	2	118	7	2
Total = 38			**Total = 25**			**Total = 127**		

Bachelor's programmes evaluated in 2020 – 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
-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Total = -			**Total = -**			**Total = 1**		

Bachelor's programmes evaluated in 2020 – 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
3	-	-	1	-	-	22	-	-
Total = 3			**Total = 1**			**Total = 22**		

Psycho-pedagogical training programmes for certification of skills for the teaching profession **= 5**

Preparatory programmes of Romanian for foreigners **= 0**

2.1.2 Institutional evaluations

Regarding higher education institutions, the state of fact in the national higher education system in 2020 was as follows, in line with GD 739/2020 as subsequently amended and supplemented (academic year 2020 - 2021):

- 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 subsequent to the ARACIS evaluations), and **two** are under monitoring procedures based on Orders of the Minister of Education. *All these universities were evaluated by ARACIS at least once;*
- Private universities provisionally authorized to operate: **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 2020 for **six** higher education institutions in Romania. *Tables 2.1.2.1 – 2.1.2.2* show details of the institutional evaluations conducted in 2020:

Table 2.1.2.1 Institutional evaluations conducted by ARACIS in 2020, grouped per the judgment obtained

Institutional evaluations conducted in 2020 = **6 universities**				
High degree of confidence	**Confidence**	**Limited degree of confidence**	**Lack of confidence**	**Institutional accreditation**
2	3	1	-	-

Table 2.1.2.2 Programmes evaluated within the institutional evaluations conducted in 2020

Bachelor's programmes evaluated within the institutional evaluations	**Full time education (IF)**	**Part-time education (IFR)**	**Distance learning (ID)**
TOTAL = 20	16	1	3
Master's study domains evaluated within the institutional evaluations	**Master's programmes evaluated within the evaluations of Master's study domains within institutional evaluations**		
4	6		

In 2020, ARACIS provided the higher education institutions with the certificates certifying the qualifications awarded after the institutional evaluations performed by the Agency in 2019 – 2020.

2.1.3 Evaluation of Master's programmes and Master's study domains

Tables 2.1.3.1 – 2.1.3.3 give an overview on the Master's programmes evaluated by ARACIS in 2020:

Table 2.1.3.1 Master's programmes evaluated in 2020 - full time education

Accreditation – MASTER'S PROGRAMME IF				Inclusion in an accredited Master's study domain	
Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence		Inclusion	Non-inclusion
7	-	2		86	3
Total = 9				Total = 89	

Table 2.1.3.2 Master's programmes evaluated in 2020 - part-time education

Accreditation – MASTER'S PROGRAMME IFR				Inclusion in an accredited Master's study domain	
Confidence	Limited confidence	No confidence		Inclusion	Non-inclusion
-	-	-		1	-
Total = -				Total = 1	

Table 2.1.3.3 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)
140	387	380	7

Evaluated Master's study domain No confidence judgment with accreditation withdrawn	Master's programmes evaluated within the evaluations of Master's study domains No confidence judgment	Full time education (IF)	Part-time education (IFR)
3	6	6	-

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 2020 and six 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 2020
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urban Planning, Physical Education and Sports	1
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	2
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	2
C12 - Medical Sciences	1
Total evaluators admitted in 2020	**6**

Three continuous training sessions were organised in 2020 in the form of a videoconference, targeting both expert evaluators from ARACIS and representatives of universities.

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 session) trained in the three training sessions*

Item no.	Course/Activity	No. of trainees
1	External evaluation at programme/study domain/institution level in blended format Session 1	213
2	External evaluation at programme/study domain/institution level in blended format Session 2	327
3	External evaluation at programme/study domain/institution level in blended format Session 3	387
Total participants in the training sessions		**927**

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 2020
National Alliance of Students' Organisations in Romania (ANOSR)	92
National Union of Students in Romania (UNSR)	61
Romanian Students' Union (USR)	16
Total student evaluators in the National Register of Evaluators - Students in 2020	**169**

2.3 Procurement of IT equipment and services

Tender books and/or technical specifications were drafted in 2020 for the procurement of various IT products or services. Thus, the following purchases were made:

- video conference system licenses Cisco Webex - 20 subscriptions;
- high capacity storage - 1 pcs.;
- processing module - 1 server;
- standard Windows Server 2019 licenses - 3 pcs.;
- client access licenses (CAL) - 35 pcs.;
- User Remote Access Server (RAS) licenses - 5 pcs.;
- desktop computers and Office licenses - 10 pcs.
- purchase of air conditioning system for the server room;
- technical services - accounting programme maintenance;
- computer system maintenance services;
- copying machines maintenance services.

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 providers, 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 the external evaluation of the academic quality of Bachelor's and Master's programmes* pertaining to some of the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions were revised.

Representatives of ARACIS also attended seminars and other national events organised in 2020, mostly online, where they contributed with several presentations on the topic of higher education quality assurance.

ARACIS had permanent consultations with the Ministry of Education; the National Council for Attestation of University Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU); the Executive Unit for the Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI); the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), the National Qualifications Authority (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.

As part of ENQA's external evaluation of ARACIS, the Agency reviewed how ENQA recommendations were implemented and submitted the Follow-up Report on the implementation of ENQA recommendations, in September 2020. The Report was approved by the ENQA Board in October 2020, on which occasion ENQA communicated their appreciation for the actions taken by ARACIS in the implementation of those recommendations.

ARACIS also decided to receive a voluntary progress visit of a small team composed of one member of the 2018 evaluation team and one new member. The visit was conducted online in October 2020, and it was a good opportunity for the Agency to reflect on its future activities. After the end of the progress visit and reception of the team's report, ARACIS sent a feedback to ENQA, including points of view on the visit and its results, according to the current procedure of the Association.

In order to implement ENQA's policy regarding active involvement of agencies in the Association's activities, ARACIS representatives attended several online events organised by the Association in 2020.

Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, as member of the Board and vice-president of ENQA, attended the Board meetings and other online meetings organised by the Association.

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

ARACIS has the obligation, under the law, to ensure its registration in the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education* – EQAR and periodically undergo the institutional accreditation procedures envisaged for keeping this status.

ARACIS is registered in EQAR since 2009.

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 registration in 2019, for a period of five years, namely until 30.09.2023.

As part of the collaboration between ARACIS and EQAR, the sustainability activities under „The Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR)" project coordinated by EQAR continued

in 2020, 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.

Following the external evaluation process conducted by ENAEE, the EUR-ACE Label Committee approved in 2019 re-authorisation for the Agency to award EUR-ACE Label certification until 31 December 2022.

Based on the documentation developed by ARACIS, evaluation visits were performed for awarding of EUR-ACE® certification. The list of EUR-ACE certified Bachelor's programmes with certification granted by ARACIS in 2020 is given in *Table 3.2.3.1*.

Table 3.2.3.1

No.	University	Study programme
1	"Transilvania" University of Brasov	Road vehicles
2		Digital production systems
3		Auto construction technology
4		Welding engineering
5		Engineering and environment protection in industry
6		Medical engineering
7		Engineering and management in tourism industry

ARACIS was represented every time at the events organised by ENAEE in 2020:

- **29 May**, online - Meeting of the ENAEE EUR-ACE Label Committee (attendant: Simona Lache);
- **14 September**, online - Meeting of the ENAEE EUR-ACE Label Committee (attendant: Simona Lache);
- **18 September**, online - ENAEE General Meeting (attendant: Simona Lache);
- **20 November**, online - Meeting of the ENAEE EUR-ACE Label Committee (attendant: Simona Lache).

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

ARACIS, through its representatives, participated online in the activities of CEENQA, including the General Meeting and various consultations on topics regarding the policy and the organisation of the Association.

Along 2020, ARACIS sent one contribution that was included for the first issue of the CEENQA Newsletter:

- July 2020, the paper on "Some Effects of COVID-19 Pandemics Protective Restrictions on ARACIS Activity".

Furthermore, Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică carried out all her responsibilities as CEENQA President in the first part of 2020.

3.2.5 Activities within 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.

In 2020, 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 2020, Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, in her capacity as the Vice-president of ARACIS and Romania's representative in the **Bologna Follow-Up Group** (BFUG), attended the meetings organised by BFUG in online format.

In 2020, ARACIS contributed to updating 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 - ESQA* project, co-funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme - KA3 – Support to Policy Reform action. Details about the ESQA project can be found at *section 5* of this report.

International evaluators selection process

In order to supplement the ARACIS Register of International Evaluators (REI) with evaluators from all higher education study domains, the *Procedure for the selection of international evaluators in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators* was finalised and published on ARACIS's web page and, based on this procedure, the Agency will organise the process to select new international evaluators in the first part of 2021.

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: www.aracis.ro; the page was permanently updated in 2020 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 specialised company contracted by ARACIS developed and improved the webpage of ARACIS under the QAFIN project in 2020.

National press monitoring

Furthermore, in 2020, the International Relations, Projects and Cooperation Direction of ARACIS (DRIPC) 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 ARACIS technical staff.

Press releases and news

Press releases regarding the activities conducted by ARACIS were drafted and issued in 2020 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 paper on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on ARACIS's activities was published in the July 2020 edition of the CEENQA Newsletter.

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 2020, 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 2020, ARACIS published a volume 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 2020, 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 - 28.07.2021.

Given the pandemic situation generated by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the implementation of the project was suspended in the period between 10.04 - 09.06.2020.

The beneficiary of the QAFIN project is the Ministry of Education - Unit for the Management of Externally Financed 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 (ESF) 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 (PASS).

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 ME 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 ME 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.*

The following activities were implemented in 2020 with a view to achieving this result:

- The World Bank experts drafted a number of working materials in English language, namely: „Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Guidelines", „Update of ARACIS Quality Assurance Methodology", „Quality Assurance for Joint Programmes – Dealing with the European Approach";
- The public consultation process for the "Methodology and Guidelines for external quality evaluation in higher education in Romania" continued with the fourth Regional Conference organised in Cluj-Napoca and the fifth Regional Conference organised in Brașov;
- Experts contracted by ARACIS and the ME analysed and provided views on the proposed Methodology and Guidelines developed by the World Bank experts. The draft Methodology and Guidelines were submitted for public consultation and approved by the ARACIS Council;
- The "Final Report of the consultation process" was drafted under the activity concerning the piloting of the new Methodology;
- The brochures pertaining to Result 1 were printed as per the project documents;
- A number of promotional materials were finalised, with the visual identity elements included;

- Operationalisation of the new ARACIS web page was finalised;
- The procedure for designing and adjusting the IT module for the external evaluation processes conducted by ARACIS was initiated and implemented.

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 experts contracted in the project finalised the Methodology and, in the first part of 2020, ARACIS and ME representatives finalised the draft normative document for the approval of the Methodology.

The brochure on the "Methodology for evaluation of universities for institutional classification and ranking of study programmes - draft" was printed in 2020.

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 before year 2020.

Result 4 – Updated *internal Organisational and Operational Regulations of ARACIS* and development of the *Manual of internal procedures*.

The following activities were carried out in 2020 with a view to achieving this result:

- World Bank experts organised the survey among ARACIS personnel, looking to understand the processes, flows and procedures of ARACIS, as well as the competence framework, and the recruitment and performance management systems;
- As a result of the aforementioned survey, the World Bank representatives organised interviews with ARACIS personnel, looking to identify weaknesses/strengths, opportunities and threats derived from the way in which ARACIS is currently organised, as well as the possibilities and needs for improvement and change;
- The World Bank experts drafted and provided ARACIS with the "Recommendation for an Internal Manual of Beneficiaries", which was analysed and accepted based on the points of view provided by the expert contracted by ARACIS;
- The World Bank experts drafted and provided ARACIS with the proposals for the modification of the "Organisational and Operational Regulations of ARACIS" and the ARACIS organisational chart; the expert contracted by the Agency analysed the proposals and submitted their points of view on how to improve the proposals.

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

By contracting the experts, in November 2020, the manual of procedures is planned to be developed between November 2020 - February 2021 and finalised at the end of February 2021.

Result 6 - *Staff of the MER 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*.

As the project was extended to July 2021, this activity is envisaged for implementation in May - July 2021.

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 on *„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 2020 to continue and strengthen the results of the projects and ensure sustainability; some of the measures taken to this purpose are:

- continued publication of the *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (Revista pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior)* – two issues published in 2020 (to be released in 2021), namely: vol. 10, no. 1 and 2, December 2020, on "Participation of a wide range of stakeholders in quality assurance in higher education";
- organising of three online training sessions for expert evaluators in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators and representatives of higher education institutions;
- 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 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

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

University of Bucharest, the "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati, the "Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi, the "Transilvania" University of Brasov and 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 2020 and the sustainability of these results was ensured.

5.3 International projects - ongoing in 2020

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. The project 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

On 24 February 2020, ARACIS organised *The Fourth TARGET Institutional Workshop* in Bucharest, attended by gender equality expert Alina Tăriceanu, members of the ARACIS Council and of the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions, representatives of universities, of ARACIP, students, and two representatives of the Austrian coordinator, Institut Fuer Hoehere Studien (Institute For

Advanced Studies) and one representative for each of the Italian partners, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini and Fondazione Regionale Per La Ricerca Biomedica.

The level of completion of the project activities was presented at the Workshop, and the representatives of universities shared their personal experience with gender policies and implementation of such policies at institutional and higher education study programme level. Ideas were proposed for the drafting of some schemes of activities on gender equality policies, as well as a preliminary draft 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 ESQA project

General presentation

The project was proposed for funding to EACEA by the Ministry of Education 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 the ME 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 the ME 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 Guide 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 Guide 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-learning activity under the ESQA project and the meeting of the project Management was held in 15-17 January 2020 at the University of Ghent in Belgium. The peer-learning activity took place within the third meeting of the Quality Assurance Support Group organised by the BFUG.

The five quality assurance agencies, members of the consortium shared their own experience about stakeholder engagement in quality assurance activities: The Danish Accreditation Institution (DAI), the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) of France, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) of the Republic of Moldova, National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEEA) of Bulgaria, and ARACIS.

Within the peer-learning activity, an ENQA representative delivered a presentation of the project of the "Study on stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance" within the European Higher Education Area. The attendants had the opportunity to learn from the experiences, procedures and best practice examples in the European community, presented in the Study. They had the opportunity to ask questions to clarify various aspects of the Study, which were topics of interest for their own activities, and propose topics that had not been tackled in the Study so far.

Some of the Group C members shared their personal examples of challenges and success. They discussed the situation in their own countries regarding stakeholder engagement in external quality assurance activities, and talked about how they approach each category of stakeholders.

With a view to finalising the "Guide for effective stakeholders' involvement in quality assurance", which is one significant output of this project, the members of Group C expressed their opinions about more efficient engagement of stakeholders in their quality assurance procedures, which were taken into account by the authors of the Guide.

The recommendations in the Guide, which were finalised in 2020 after finalisation of the Study, have entered the implementation phase, and a consultation was initiated with quality assurance agencies partners in the ESQA project to identify the requirements for change in policies and actions for efficient engagement of stakeholders in quality assurance activities. The results of this consultation are expected to be finalised in 2021. At the time of writing this report, a Needs Analysis is reaching its final stage, to identify what each quality assurance agency, partner in the project will need in order to implement the Guide recommendations; this Needs Analysis will be followed by action plans with specific responsibilities and deadlines.

5.4 International projects – completed

5.4.1 The DEQAR project

General presentation

The project "Database of External Quality Assurance Results", co-funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ programme, *Key Action 3* was coordinated by EQAR; partners in the project were EQAR-listed quality assurance agencies, important European organisations (including ENQA), and a research partner; ARACIS was one of the partners.

The project was implemented between November 2017 - October 2019.

Project aim

The aim of the project was 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, was 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 was 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 for Romania, with project management, through the representative of the European consortium implementing the ETER, from the *Universita della Svizzera Italiana*, Switzerland.

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

The process of actually sending the reports produced following the institutional evaluations and the reports produced following the evaluations of Bachelor's programmes actually started in 2018.

The process of sending evaluation reports on the evaluations of higher education study programmes conducted in 2020 to DEQAR continued in 2020, except for the reports pertaining to December 2020 and the reports produced following institutional evaluations. These will be sent to DEQAR in the first part of 2021.

6. SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ARACIS in 2020

1. The current activity continued in compliance with the regulations in force with a view to carrying out the Agency's mission. ***Six*** institutional evaluations were completed in 2020, with two "High confidence" judgments, three "Confidence" judgments, and one "Limited confidence" judgment. Compared to 2019, the number of "High confidence" and "Confidence" judgments awarded was the same, as a proportion of the total number of institutional evaluations conducted, and no "No confidence" judgment was awarded.

   Furthermore, ***217*** Bachelor's programmes were evaluated, out of which 20 within institutional evaluations, in all forms of education (full time, part-time and distance learning). The number of evaluations of Bachelor's programmes finalised with a "Confidence" judgment is ***201,*** namely 92.63%.

   Study programme evaluations 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 and 96.44% in 2019. 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 92.85%, recalculated for the period of 2013-2020, when 2.644 Bachelor's programmes were evaluated.

2. Implementation of the recommendations and observations contained in the ENQA Report (2018) has continued: the ARACIS strategy for 2018 – 2021, published on the Agency's web page, was the document based on which the actions and steps taken by the Agency were decided.

   In the fall of 2020, within the external evaluation of ARACIS conducted by ENQA, the Agency drafted and submitted the Follow-up Report on the implementation of ENQA's recommendations, approved with no comments by the ENQA Board.

   Furthermore, as shown in Section 3, ARACIS received a progress visit by a team of two ENQA experts. Following the visit, a feedback was sent by ARACIS to ENQA, covering the points of view of the Agency on the manner of conducting and the usefulness of the visit, highlighting the aspects that should be pursued with a view to improving this type of support provided to Agencies by ENQA.

3. The activities concerning the development of the Agency's new web page under the QAFIN project were finalised in 2020. The Agency's reports are published on the web page in a searchable format.

4. 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.

5. Implementation of measures for internal quality assurance continued:

   - adjustment of the elements required for improving how the information received from universities is processed and used, based on the feedback questionnaire collected by ARACIS from the evaluated institutions;

   - drafted and approved internal system and operational procedures. Implementation of the provisions of the internal system and operational procedures continued in 2020, 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 2021) the completion of regulations and guidelines for the evaluation of doctoral studies, and initiation of the evaluation activity for this third higher education cycle.

   - as a partner of the ME, the Agency participated in the ESQA project focused on achieving greater engagement of stakeholders in quality assurance in education; the data provided by ARACIS, requested through a questionnaire, contributed to the development, in 2020, of the "Study on stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance" and the "Guide for effective stakeholders' involvement in quality assurance";

   - successful implementation of the project on "*Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating the quality standards - QAFIN"*, in partnership with the Ministry of Education – Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects.

6. The structure of the permanent staff in the Agency's internal directions and services did not change significantly 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:

   - implementing activities to ensure the sustainability of the DEQAR project of the European Commission;

   - Mrs Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, ARACIS Vice-president, continuing to perform her mandate as Vice-president of ENQA, as well as her mandate as a President of CEENQA, which ended in June 2020;

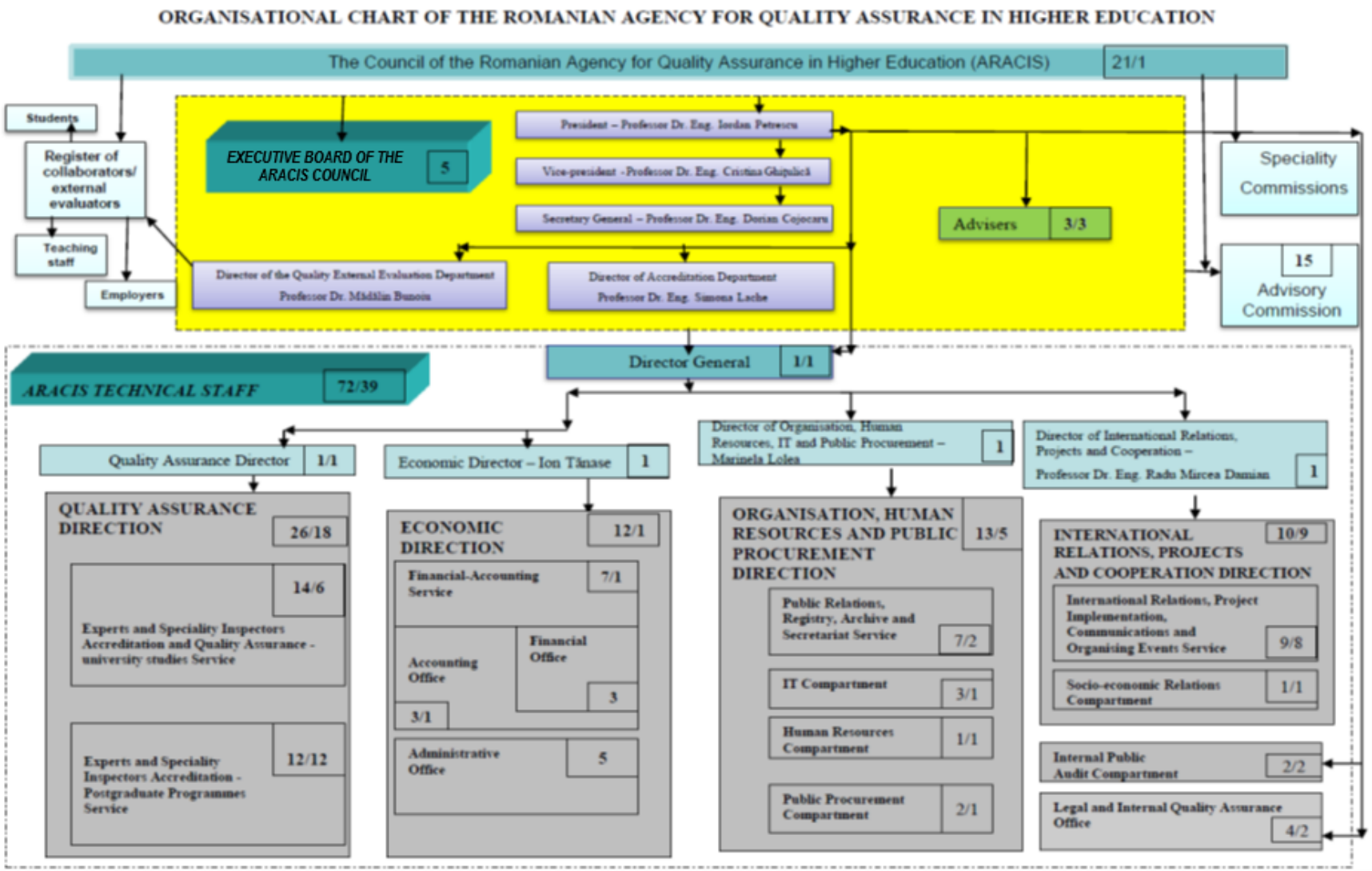
   - continued publication of the QAR, which contains contributions of authors from Romania and from other countries.

It is appropriate to mention that the quality of ARACIS's activity has improved in 2020 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/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Strategia_ARACIS_pentru_2018-2021_-_Final_28.01.20191.pdf

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – ARACIS organisational structure



Appendix 2 – Members of the ARACIS Council (2020)

President:

1. Professor Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu

Vice-President:

2. Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică

Secretary General:

3. Professor Dr. Eng. Dorian Cojocaru

Director of the Quality External Evaluation Department:

4. Associate Professor Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu

Director 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. Dr. eng. Romeo-Cristian Erbașu
19. Costel Marian Dalban – student
20. Horia Șerban Onița – student

Appendix 3 – ARACIS Advisory Commission (2020)

Academician Ionel Haiduc - Romanian Academy

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

Prof. Cezar Bîrzea - National University of Political Studies and Public Administration

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

Prof. Dumitru Gaşpar - West University of Timisoara

Prof. Viorel Lefter - Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Prof. Mircea Miclea - „Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

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

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

Prof. Alexandru Popovici - Petroleum Gas University of Ploiesti

Prof. Zoltan Rostas - University of Bucharest

Prof. Gheorghe Solomon - Politehnica University of Bucharest