**THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**
*Member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ENQA*
*Listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR*

# Key strategic directions of ARACIS
# for 2022-2026

## I.   MISSION

ARACIS contributes to quality assurance in higher education, nationally and in the member states of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), mainly through evaluation and external quality assurance activities provided for education-providing organisations operating in Romania and for Romanian education providers legally operating in other countries, according to the laws in force.

## II.   DUTIES

- Develops and regularly reviews the Methodology and the national reference standards and performance indicators, as well as its own procedures/guides/documents for the quality evaluation and assurance in higher education;
- Evaluates and proposes provisional authorisation or accreditation of higher education providers and/or their study domains;
- Periodically evaluates higher education providers and their study programmes/domains;
- Works with the Ministry of Education and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), and with the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC) to draft and promote policies and action strategies with a view to improving the quality of education in Romania;
- Organises annual consultations with higher education institutions and representatives of the students and the social-economic environment, to establish the priorities for the quality assurance mechanisms;
- Publishes manuals, guides, summaries of best practice in quality evaluation and quality assurance;
- Regularly develops system analyses on the quality of higher education in Romania;
- Collaborates with similar agencies in other countries to develop and implement efficient actions to improve the quality of study programmes in higher education;
- Analyses and approves the methodology and terms of reference used by other EQAR-registered agencies in external evaluation activities for education providers in Romania, and validates the related evaluation report;

- Develops and implements the Code of ethics and rules of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS regarding the quality assurance and assessment in higher education in Romania;
- Publishes an annual report on its own activity;
- Draws up self-assessment reports on the quality of its own activity in preparation of the external evaluation regarding compliance with the ESG;
- Performs other tasks, according to the laws regulating higher education.

## III. STRATEGIC LINES OF ACTION

- Design and carry out relevant external quality evaluation processes aligned with high professional standards
- Develop policies and recommendations to improve the quality of higher education
- Strengthen ARACIS's position internationally
- Strengthen the trust of the stakeholders in external quality evaluation processes and in the quality of the higher education system
- Improve the Agency's institutional capacity

### III.1. Design and carry out relevant external quality evaluation processes aligned with high professional standards

ARACIS's priority must be to always assure adequate external evaluation processes, carried out professionally and in line with the highest ethical and integrity standards, which should contribute to developing a quality culture among higher education institutions and implicitly to improving the quality of educational and related processes.

| Actions | Description |
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| *Revise the methodologies, guides and instruments used in external evaluation processes* | ARACIS ensures the updating, coherence, and correlation between the instruments used in external evaluation processes (methodologies, guidelines, visit schedules, reports etc.), according to the laws in force and in line with the phase of development of the higher education system and the quality assurance system in Romania, and identifies quality standards that are aligned with the newest trends in higher education, nationally and internationally (for example, learning in diverse environments; adapting to the needs of "non-traditional" students; increasing the share of formative evaluation to the detriment of summative evaluation; building of soft skills; retaining students throughout the teaching activities; using digital tools in learning - teaching - evaluation processes). |

| Actions | Description |
|---|---|
| *Enhance the focus on learning outcomes in the external evaluation of higher education study programmes* | ARACIS performs actions and activities to support higher education institutions in developing study programmes focused on learning outcomes; revises specific standards of the ARACIS speciality expert commissions by shifting the paradigm from subject matter-oriented study programmes to learning outcome-oriented study programmes. |
| *Create the necessary framework for the evaluation of post-graduate study programmes, and initiate these processes* | Draw up a methodology for the evaluation of post-graduate study programmes and the instruments required for the external quality evaluation of these programmes. |
| *Create the necessary framework for the evaluation of joint study programmes, and initiate these processes* | Develop the instruments to operationalise the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* and start such evaluations, by request of higher education institutions. |
| *Shift the focus in external quality evaluation processes to support higher education institutions in identifying their directions for development* | Develop external evaluation processes that focus on supporting higher education institutions in identifying future directions for development, bearing in mind that, as a result of the developments in the last 15 years, the higher education and quality assurance system has reached a level of maturity that requires an approach focused on improving activities, rather than merely checking that the minimal standards are met. |
| *Revise standards and performance indicators related to the scientific research component* | Develop a system of standards and indicators that do not focus on merely quantitative assessments, which would make use responsibly of scientometric indicators and focus prevailingly on qualitative aspects of the research results, allowing an evaluation of how the research activity supports teaching processes. |

## III.2. Develop policies and recommendations to improve the quality of higher education

ARACIS is an active player in defining national educational policies, based on its experience acquired nationally and internationally, and on the experts that make the Agency's human resource.

| Actions | Description |
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| Active involvement of ARACIS in developing innovative educational policies | The following domains are considered: micro certifications, short-cycle higher education, dual higher education, carrying out of teaching activities using digital tools, learning in diverse environments etc.<br>ARACIS provides decision-makers in education and higher education institutions with studies, analyses and best practice recommendations to substantiate their decisions and contribute to improving the quality of higher education in Romania. |
| Develop studies, reports, research in fields of interest | Research topics are established by consultations with stakeholders. The research activity is based on data produced by external quality evaluation activities, and on data provided by other sources or collected according to the topics established. Such studies and reports are disseminated and capitalised with a view to identifying directions for developing the quality of higher education.<br>The Agency develops an annual activity report. |
| Contribute scientific papers in domestic and international events, and publication in well-known journals | Research results are also capitalised by publishing scientific papers and participating in events in the field. |
| Increase the visibility of the ARACIS Journal – Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR) | The Agency's Journal is published regularly, aiming to having it indexed in new databases. A permanent editorial committee is appointed, and a substantial database of reviewers is constituted. |
| Participate in calls for project proposals in quality assurance | Actively identify calls for project proposals and relevant partnerships in the fields of interest. |

### III.3. Strengthen ARACIS's position internationally

ARACIS must remain engaged as an international player through its representatives.

| Actions | Description |
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| Active representation of ARACIS in the international structures that it is a member of, and expansion towards other relevant structures | ARACIS continues to be actively engaged in the international structures that it is a member of, such as ENQA, INQAAHE, CEENQA or ENAEE, and acts to expand its membership towards other relevant associative structures. |
| Carry out quality evaluation processes for European university alliances or for other higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area | Participate in calls, aiming to carry out procedures internationally, especially within European university alliances. Establish partnerships with other ENQA member agencies to carry out such procedures, where relevant. |
| Carry out the self-assessment activity and enable the periodic external evaluation by ENQA | In 2022 – 2023, ARACIS is subject to an external review conducted by ENQA, to continue its membership in this association, as well as to renew EQAR registration. |

### III.4. Strengthen the trust of the stakeholders in external quality evaluation processes and in the quality of the higher education system

ARACIS strengthens its image as a credible player, constantly present in the public space, whose positions, decisions or recommendations are a landmark for the development of higher education in Romania and contribute to strengthening the trust of direct and indirect beneficiaries regarding the quality of education.

| Actions | Description |
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| Diversify the modalities of public communication of ARACIS and increase the Agency's presence in the public space | Active presence on social media, permanent communication with the mass media in a manner that is easy to understand for the general audience, or transparent publication on the website of all decisions and positions adopted by ARACIS is a routine in the Agency's activity, aimed at strengthening the Agency's position in the public perception. Identify new modalities of communication. Improve the Agency's website look and accessibility. |

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| Strengthen the engagement of stakeholders in external quality evaluation processes and in the Agency's activities. | Implement the stakeholder engagement action plan developed under the ESQA project. |

## III.5. Improve the Agency's institutional capacity

The activity of ARACIS must be supported by solid, efficient and effective technical staff, with clear, coherent procedures and workflows, digital tools to simplify the processes, and sufficient, properly trained human resources.

| Actions | Description |
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| Improve internal quality assurance mechanisms at the Agency | Aim to update and permanently improve the documents related to the internal functioning of the Agency and the processes carried out, by taking into account the opinions collected permanently from stakeholders, as well as the acquired experience. |
| Continuous training of the employed staff, and creation of professional development opportunities for them | Develop a training plan that takes into account the professional development needs of the staff, and enables continuous updating of knowledge regarding national regulations or European trends in quality assurance. Consider best practice and experience exchanges with similar agencies. |
| Organise training programmes for expert evaluators | Training programmes focus on topics that are relevant for external quality evaluation activities; they are hands-on and make use of digital tools, as well as of in-person training sessions. |
| Efficiently use the Agency's resources and attract additional resources to carry out the activities | The Agency's resources will be used so as to ensure the fulfilment of the Agency's tasks, as well as the efficient, effective operation and institutional development of the Agency. Additional resources are attracted from projects with non-reimbursable funding, and new income sources will be identified, subject to the law. |
| Implement digital tools to simplify the formal aspects related to external evaluation processes and the internal activity of the Agency | Implement electronic signature and electronic document circuit. Operationalise the platform to enable performance of external evaluation activities in digital format and management of the National Register of Evaluators. |

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