



Policy Declaration regarding internal quality assurance at ARACIS

ARACIS description

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) (ARACIS), established in 2005, successor of the National Academic Evaluation and Accreditation Council¹, is an autonomous public institution of national relevance whose goal is external quality assurance and evaluation of the education provided by higher education institutions and other organisations providing higher education study programmes.

ARACIS is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – [ENQA](#) since 2009 and undergoes regular reviews every five years to maintain this membership. ARACIS is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – [EQAR](#) since 2009 and regularly carries out the required process for maintaining such status.

In its activities, ARACIS complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

ARACIS 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.

ARACIS provides *certification of compliance with the quality standards* for higher education institutions and education-providing organisations, through external education quality evaluation processes.

ARACIS *conducts external quality assurance activities by request* for:

- higher education institutions and education-providing organisations operating in Romania;
- higher education institutions and education-providing organisations operating in other countries, according to the law;
- higher education institutions in the EU Area;
- higher education institutions in third countries.

The lawmaker assigned ARACIS the mission to perform the *external quality evaluation* of the education organised by higher education institutions and other

¹ National Academic Evaluation and Accreditation Council, established under Law 88/1993.



education-providing organisations in the form of higher education study programmes, to:

- certify, according to quality standards, the *capacity* of higher education institutions and education-providing organisations to meet the beneficiaries' trust and expectations;
- contribute to developing an *institutional quality culture* based on respect, mutual support, and loyalty in higher education;
- assure the *protection of direct beneficiaries* of education provided through higher education study programmes and by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent, credible, publicly accessible information about education quality.

ARACIS develops and proposes to the Ministry of Education *strategies and policies for the continuous improvement of the quality* of higher education, in correlation with pre-university education.

Strategic objectives of ARACIS

In order to carry out the mission established for it, the Agency aims to ensure the following in its activity:

- design and carry out *relevant* external quality evaluation processes at high professional standards;
- develop policies and recommendations to *improve the quality* of higher education;
- strengthen the *trust* of the stakeholders in external quality evaluation processes and in the quality of the higher education system;
- strengthen ARACIS's position *internationally*;
- permanently improve the Agency's *institutional capacity*.

ARACIS's duties

Pursuant to the standards and the methodology approved by Government decisions or based on the standards and methodologies established at the European level through the [European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#), as applicable, ARACIS operates as a *provider of external education quality evaluation services* for:

- the authorising and accreditation of higher education providers and their study programmes;
- the authorising and accreditation of joint study programmes.

Furthermore, ARACIS develops and regularly reviews the Methodology and the national reference standards and performance indicators, as well as its own procedures/guides/documents for quality evaluation and assurance in higher education.



ARACIS has the following duties related to quality assurance:

- *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 practices in quality evaluation and 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 norms 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.

ARACIS 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.

In its activities, ARACIS takes professional and legal *responsibility for objective*, fact-based decisions produced by technical teams and validated by the internal management bodies, within a system that allows for consultations with the beneficiaries of external evaluation services.

ARACIS commits to *permanently improve the quality of its services* and states its commitment to comply with the fundamental principles of the ESG.

ARACIS's values and principles

Autonomy ensures that ARACIS is organised and operates independently, away from any political or other interference. ARACIS operates *independently*, a principle according to which ARACIS members must carry out their tasks *impartially*, act *independent* from any external influence and from other groups of interests, and not get involved in activities in which they have a direct personal stake.

ARACIS places special emphasis on ensuring sound, *objective, impartial* evaluations; effective activity of the panels; solid statements and argumentations; compliance with the deadlines set in regulations and procedures.



ARACIS promotes *transparency* within a coherent quality assurance framework, and aims to provide clear, correct information in order to enhance the beneficiaries' trust in the Romanian higher education system, while ensuring personal data confidentiality, as well as *confidentiality*, as a principle according to which, in their external evaluation activity, members are forbidden to disclose data, information and documents they have access to while carrying out their job duties and obligations, use or publish such information without clear, express authorisation and unless there is a legal or professional right or they have a duty to publish such information.

ARACIS recognises the *diversity* of approaches in external quality assurance and, therefore, participates in external education quality evaluation processes together with other agencies registered on EQAR. Furthermore, ARACIS takes into account the *diversity* of higher education institutions and education providers when performing external quality evaluation activities.

Professional competence, as a principle according to which all activities performed by ARACIS members are treated responsibly, competently and effectively, based on the acquired knowledge and skills.

ARACIS supports *integrity*, as a principle according to which the activity of expert evaluators is performed in *honesty* and *correctness*, as well as *neutrality*, as a principle according to which members have to refrain from expressing or manifesting their own opinions concerning the documents analysed while performing activities; these are values that ARACIS pursues throughout the activities of its members.

Respect is manifested through the consideration that every expert evaluator and ARACIS COUNCIL member displays in relation with professors, students, colleagues regarding their rights and freedoms, and regarding the laws, social values, ethical norms, and norms of conduct.

Loyalty requires that every ARACIS member act for the interest of ARACIS, and support the Agency's objectives, policies and strategies.

Principles and objectives of internal quality assurance

The principles that guide the activities of ARACIS are as follows:

- The principle of *lawfulness*;
- The principle of *objectivity*;
- The principle of *validity*;
- The principle of *confidentiality*;
- The principle of *transparency*.

The results of the quality of ARACIS activities show in:

- The quality of the evaluators and groups of experts;



- The quality of the criteria, standards, indicators and procedure principles used;
- The quality of the implementation of the procedure criteria and principles; this includes both the efficiency and the efficacy of processes;
- Third-party recognition of the results obtained.

Objectives of the internal quality assurance system:

- to promote a *culture* of internal quality assurance;
- to *efficiently* manage and continuously improve the Agency's processes and resources;
- to identify, integrate and establish the *interaction* of all the elements of the internal quality assurance system within the Agency;
- to *train* the employees, including the members of the ARACIS Council, on topics regarding internal quality assurance, in order to increase awareness on the importance of individual contribution to achieving the Agency's objectives;
- to improve awareness and promote the *importance* of internal quality assurance among the Agency's own staff, management, and technical structures composed of expert evaluators, bearing in mind the impact that the results of the external education quality assurance evaluation services provided by the Agency has in the society.

The Agency's management supports the quality policy with a view to carrying out the mission of effectively providing external education quality evaluation services, in compliance with the requirements of the law, and with optimal use of the resources.

The management of ARACIS officially makes a permanent commitment to quality, by implementing, maintaining, and continuously improving the internal quality assurance system, in line with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), integrated with the internal management control system standards, through a set of measures and procedures aimed at achieving the objectives and carrying out activities regularly, economically, effectively and efficiently.

For the purpose of internal quality assurance, the management of ARACIS undertakes:

- to manage the Agency *effectively, efficiently, systematically* and *transparently*, in order to strengthen the beneficiaries' trust in the Agency's services;
- to establish *unity* between the goal and the activities, by aligning strategies, policies, processes and resources to reach the objectives;
- to identify and understand the *needs* and *expectations* of higher education institutions, and aim to meet such needs in a fair, balanced manner;
- to ensure adequate *communication* with all relevant stakeholders;



- to create and support shared *values* and ethical behaviour models by establishing a culture of trust, independence, integrity and impartiality, and make sure that the staff involved in the Agency's activities is competent and acts professionally and ethically;
- to support relevant management positions in order to prove their leadership at their level of responsibility;
- to maintain an internal environment in which the staff is aware of the importance of their individual contribution to carrying out the Agency's objectives, by promoting collaboration and communication with and between the Agency's employees;
- to operate with internal and external feedback mechanisms that result in continuous quality improvement within the Agency;
- to protect against intolerance or any form of discrimination;
- to offer staff opportunities to develop their competences (skills, training, education and experience);
- to make decisions based on evidence, by objectively evaluating facts, based on data/information analysis and the assurance that such data and information is sufficiently accurate, reliable, and certain;
- to identify risks and opportunities, and plan actions to treat those that can (negatively or positively) impact on achieving the objectives and on the capability to meet requirements;
- to regularly review the Agency's performance, by measuring performance indicators, performing self-assessments and management reviews, and through internal audit;
- to make sure that any activity carried out by evaluator experts is aligned to the ESG and ARACIS's policy;
- to demonstrate the Agency's competence before similar European and international bodies;
- to make sure that the integrity of the internal quality assurance system is maintained when changes are planned and implemented in the Agency.

Description of the internal quality assurance system (IQAS)

To ensure the quality of the activities and services delivered, ARACIS develops, implements, and maintains an internal quality assurance system (hereinafter IQAS), which is regularly updated to respond to the needs regarding assuring the quality of ARACIS's activities, the requirements of the bodies providing evaluation for European-level recognition, and the national legislation.

ARACIS defined the processes, the document management, and the



responsibilities within the internal quality assurance system (IQAS), and the results of this system, together with the internal and external feedback, support quality development in all the Agency's activities.

To ensure continuous improvement, ARACIS's management *monitors* the processes of the internal quality assurance process, and the acquired data is analysed and used when taking specific steps to improve those processes.

Through the Agency's Code of Ethics and its external evaluation methodologies, ARACIS is fully aligned with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). *ESG* are an integral part of the Agency's internal quality assurance system and the processes and procedures that make it work.

The Agency's internal quality assurance system comprises all the activities carried out by the Agency, which are grouped in two types of interconnected processes, as described below:

- ✓ **The main (core) processes** – include the management process and the general process (of carrying out external evaluation services). Within the management process, the ARACIS Council, which is the Agency's decision-making body, establishes the Agency's strategic objectives; approves the results of the external education evaluation procedures and the membership of the expert evaluator panels and other commissions; defines the communication policy and guides the partnership policy; approves the budget and validates the main strategic and methodological documents (the external quality evaluation methodology and procedures; the self-assessment report; the annual report; the thematic analyses, etc.). Within this management process, ARACIS developed the Internal quality assurance system.

The general process (of carrying out external evaluation services) includes the procedures that cover the various stages related to the Agency's main mission, namely performing external education quality evaluation of the higher education study programmes organised in higher education institutions and education-providing organisations, and institutional quality evaluation of education-providing organisations.

The operational process includes actions carried out by the executive structure in planning and preparing the various stages of the evaluation, both with the institutions and with the selected experts: selecting the experts; performing the evaluation visits by the evaluator expert panels; developing, submitting and publishing various evaluation reports, and performing monitoring activities.

By applying the internal quality assurance system (IQAS), every process mentioned above is supported by internal quality assurance working instruments, drafted as reference documents, defined through responsibilities and resource allocation.

- ✓ **Support processes** – are those processes that support the proper functioning of the main processes. The IQAS of the support processes includes procedures implemented by the executive structure to ensure proper operation of the



Agency and its activities: secretariat and archiving; communication with stakeholders; maintenance of the website; monitoring documents and legislation; managing human and material resources; managing the accounting and the evaluation logistics. These procedures are constituted according to the Managerial Internal Control Standards², and their purpose is to enable the achievement of the objectives and performance of the activities in a cost-effective, effective and efficient manner.

The maintenance and continuous improvement of the Internal quality assurance system complies with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), integrated with the internal management control standards.

The Agency also has a **public internal audit compartment**³, organised as a functionally independent, objective activity providing assurance and advice, helping the Agency to meet its objectives. Assurance activities are objective examinations of the evidence, performed with the aim to provide the Agency with an independent evaluation of the risk management, control, and governance processes, and advisory activities are intended to add value and improve governance processes within the Agency, without the internal audit undertaking any managerial responsibilities.

Reference documents

- Government Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 on quality assurance, as further amended and supplemented;
- Government Decision 1418/2006 on approving the External evaluation methodology, standards, reference standards, and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, as further amended and supplemented;
- Order of the General Secretariat of the Government no. 600/2018 on approving the Code of managerial internal control of public entities, as further amended and supplemented;
- The Agency's Development Strategy and operational plans;
- Regulations:
 - *Regulation on the Organization and Operation of ARACIS*
 - [ARACIS Internal Regulations](#),
 - [Regulations for conducting the activities of the permanent \(speciality\) expert commissions of ARACIS](#),
 - [The Organising and Operating Regulation of the Monitoring Commission for the implementation and development of the internal management control system](#);
- The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area - ESG;

² Organised according to the Order of the General Secretariat of the Government no. 600/2018 on approving the Code of managerial internal control of public entities, as further amended and supplemented

³ Organised according to Law no. 672/2002 on public internal audit, as further amended and supplemented



- The Code of ethics and norms of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS regarding the quality assurance and assessment in higher education in Romania;
- Procedures regarding the general process, according to annex no. 1;
- Procedures developed within the Internal Management Control System;
- External education quality evaluation methodologies;
- External education quality evaluation activity guides;
- Specific standards of the Permanent Speciality Expert Commissions;
- External documents of recognition bodies (Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews, EQAR Procedure for Applications, EQAR Policy on Targeted Reviews);
- Results of research activities and thematic studies;
- Results of stakeholder satisfaction activities;
- Corrective and preventive action instruments - (management of complaints and petitions submitted in external quality evaluation processes);
- Agency's activity reports.

The management of ARACIS undertakes to ensure compliance with this policy regarding quality, by its own staff and by the contracted expert evaluators; the policy is improved and reviewed so that it is aligned to the Agency's needs, according to the context of its activities.

APPROVED BY DECISION OF THE ARACIS COUNCIL NO. 108/H/28.10.2022

Procedures for the main processes

No.	Name of procedure	link
1	Procedure for selecting and appointing the members who are employers' representatives in the permanent expert commissions (speciality commissions) of ARACIS	https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Procedura_selectare_angajatori_CEP_actualizare-cf-6_H_14.01.2022.pdf
2	Procedure for appointing the members of the expert evaluator commissions in the external evaluation processes of Bachelor's degree study programmes and Master's degree study Domains	https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Procedura_nu_mire_echipe_vizita_evaluare_PS_18.08.20191.pdf
3	Procedure for the selection of international evaluators in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators	https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ARACIS-Procedure-for-the-selection-of-international-evaluators_Dec-2020-corectat.pdf
4	Procedure for selecting and appointing the students members of the permanent speciality commissions	https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/v2_Procedura_selectie_studenti_comisii_de_specialitate.pdf
5	The procedure for selecting and appointing members professors on the permanent expert commissions (speciality commissions) of ARACIS	https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Procedura-selectare-membri-comisii-permanente.pdf
6	Procedures for the periodic external accreditation/evaluation of Master's study domains	https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Proceduri_privind_evaluarea_domeniilor_de_master_-_modificat_1_iunie_2017_-_de_afisat_pe_site.pdf
7	Procedure for the external evaluation of academic quality - change of institutional advise/judgment	https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Procedura_evaluare_externa_a_calitatii_-_schimbare_calificativ_22.10.2010_.pdf