



ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Strategy of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)

For the period 2018 - 2021



1. Introduction

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is known by the Romanian acronym ARACIS which stands (in Romanian) for „***Agenția Română pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior***”, was established in 2005 according to the legal provisions of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved by the Law no. 87/2006, with subsequent amendments and completions. According to this “ARACIS is an autonomous public institution of national interest, a legal entity with own income and expenses budget”.

ARACIS’s mission is, to assess the quality of the study programs, master study domains and higher education institutions as well as to contribute, together with the HEIs, to a continuous enhancement of quality. In addition, ARACIS is to proceed to the external evaluation/accreditation of the third cycle of university studies (doctoral). The agency is also aiming to contribute at the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality.

New trends in European quality assurance direct attention towards the need to comply with more democratic procedures and more emphasis on the valorization of learning outcomes. Evaluation of competences of higher education graduates according to the European Framework of Qualifications EQF and employability are the new challenges for quality assurance indicators. ARACIS is ready to meet these new challenges, and continues to deliver as part of the system of co-regulation which benefits all students, now and in the future.

The quality of higher education is vitally important to Romanian Higher Education System. Recognition of the quality of higher education and thus of the diplomas conferred, in a national but also an international context, is important to students, educational establishments, the labour market, and society at a whole.

External quality assurance and accreditation acknowledge such quality and support the higher education institutions in their efforts to make any improvements that are necessary.

ARACIS monitors the quality of higher education and is committed to improving the visibility of such quality in society. This results in public information on the quality of higher education. ARACIS feels accountable for the decisions it makes, as they



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impact on the development of higher education building its credibility through objective evaluations and opinions, professional activities, adherence the principle of openness and transparency of applied procedures, presenting clear arguments, and respecting ethical principles and academic tradition This is the perspective from which ARACIS develops its assessment frameworks and procedures.

ARACIS fulfills its duty in cooperation and dialogue with all stakeholders of the education process, including the academic community, candidates for studies, employers, state authorities and public administration.

This document outlines the ARACIS strategy for the period 2018-2021. The first section of this strategy document explains the mission, vision, and approach of ARACIS. The second section brings the strategy into focus by indicating the issues on which ARACIS is taking concrete action. ARACIS will implement this strategy into annual activity plans, in which the priorities for the given period will be elaborated in more detail.

The development of this Strategic Plan was overseen by the ARACIS Board and following significant input from its members. The draft Plan was endorsed by the Board for recommendation to the Council of the ARACIS. The Plan was approved by the Council of ARACIS in December 2018.



2. ARACIS's mission, vision, and values

2.1 Mission

ARACIS's mission is, according to the Law, to assess the quality of the study programs, master study domains and higher education institutions, as well as to contribute, together with the HEIs, to a continuous enhancement of quality. The agency is also aiming to contribute at the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality.

The quality of higher education is of vital importance to Romanian society and as a consequence of that, ARACIS involves all stakeholders in the performance of its tasks. Wherever relevant ARACIS collaborates, at both national and international levels, with other organizations involved in the development of higher education.

In all its assessment tasks, ARACIS respects both the responsibility of higher education for the quality of their education and the autonomy of the institutions and in the external quality assurance the guiding principle is peer review.

ARACIS operates responsibly in terms of form and contents and counsels all stakeholders and participants in tertiary education in line with the European and global directions of development.

2.2 Vision

With its system of quality assurance ARACIS will contribute to the improvement of quality of higher education in Romania, where students have access to high quality education and research and can achieve qualifications that are competitive and equally integrated in European Higher Education Area.

Due to its valuable work and its effective contribution to the quality of higher education ARACIS tends to become a benchmark in quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

2.3 Values

ARACIS is open to the diversity of higher education institutions and quality assurance approaches and adheres to the following values:



2.3.1 Transparency

ARACIS publishes its policies, methodologies, procedures and criteria for decisions and reports.

2.3.2 Independence

ARACIS permanently promotes the operational independence of its decisions and supports the autonomy of higher education institutions.

2.3.3 Collaboration

ARACIS works in a consultative manner with Higher Education Institutions, National Council of Rectors, all stakeholders involved in HE, European partners and fellow associations.

2.3.4 Integrity

ARACIS operates with integrity and in a fair, equitable, impartial, objective and professional manner.

2.3.5 User orientation

ARACIS constantly is adapting the services it provides to its users' needs and expectations

2.3.6 Accountability

ARACIS is accountable to all stakeholders through its governance structures and has complaints and appeals processes in place to ensure it is held accountable for all the decisions.



3. Strategic areas and objectives

Strategic Area 1 - ARACIS contribute effectively towards enhancing the quality of higher education and provides to various stakeholders a better understanding of how it works.

ARACIS is representative to quality assurance agencies in Higher Education, nationally or internationally, operating at programme and institutional level and practising accreditation, audit or evaluation methodologies.

Strategic Objective 1.1 - Analysing the higher education system

- ✓ To provide the society with useful information concerning the quality of higher education so as to facilitate decision-making;
- ✓ To encourage the development of planning and foresight activities;
- ✓ To issue reports using the relevant indicators and including data from the assessment outcomes, thus allowing for a comprehensive and efficient analysis;
- ✓ To find the appropriate balance between internal and external quality assurance in Romanian national contexts.

Strategic Objective 1.2 Fostering improvement in the quality of the higher education system

- ✓ To issue assessment reports whose suggestions and recommendations for improvement offer value to users;
- ✓ To design and conduct external quality assurance of double degree programmes, for example these offered as joint programmes, and doctoral studies;
- ✓ To instigate periodic follow-up of the evaluations conducted and to gauge the extent to which recommendations are being implemented;
- ✓ To analyse and boost the impact and effectiveness of ARACIS work.

Strategic Objective 1.3 - developing competences of ARACIS members and experts

- ✓ To design and implement a system for the assessment and improvement of the quality of the work of individual evaluation panel members;



- ✓ To develop an effective system of introductory and continuing training for members of evaluation panels on specific issues related to the evaluation of education quality;
- ✓ To continue to organize events on relevant and topical issues and offer opportunities for its members to exchange good practice and information;
- ✓ To optimise the information and training provided to experts concerning the processes in which they are involved and the means available to help them carry out their work;
- ✓ To systematise the updating of databases which cover ARACIS's collaborators and experts;
- ✓ To encourage the exchange of information concerning experienced evaluators with international assessment agencies and bodies.

Strategic Objective 1.4 - modernising the organisation of evaluation panels' work

- ✓ To issue assessment reports whose suggestions and recommendations for improvement offer value to users;
- ✓ To instigate periodic follow-up of the evaluations conducted and to gauge the extent to which recommendations are being implemented;
- ✓ To extend and strengthen experts activities aimed at offering guidance and support to institutions in the matter of quality.

Strategic Objective 1.5 - improving the efficiency and transparency of accreditation procedures

- ✓ To develop of specifications and implementation of IT systems supporting the accreditation procedures and taking into account ARACIS practices for the verification of the quality of site visit reports;
- ✓ To strengthen the ARACIS's internal channels of communication;
- ✓ To promote further development of the knowledge base of quality assurance in the EHEA and support its dissemination among stakeholders, policy makers and other interested parties;
- ✓ To encourage the exchange of information concerning experienced evaluators with international assessment agencies and bodies.



Strategic Area 2 - ARACIS as a partner in fostering quality culture in Higher Education

ARACIS cooperates with strategic partners and networks in EHEA to contribute to the global development of quality assurance of higher education and to learn from the developments outside national context.

Strategic Objective 2.1 - conducting analysis and research

- ✓ To collect objective information about the effectiveness of actions taken to carry out ARACIS's mission;
- ✓ To conduct analysis and research and disseminating their results aim to improve ARACIS's operational methods on the basis of documented study results.

Strategic Objective 2.2 – increase the dialogue with external and internal stakeholders

- ✓ To strengthen channels of communication with all the stakeholders involved in higher education;
- ✓ To increase the number of projects undertaken jointly with other stakeholders, particularly with the universities;
- ✓ To encourage student involvement in quality assurance processes;
- ✓ To systematically maintain participation in European projects;
- ✓ To foster cooperation and establish agreements with other international assessment agencies and bodies.

Strategic Objective 2.3 - disseminating good practices in Higher Education quality assurance

- ✓ To organize and support conferences, workshops and seminars with country-wide and regional scope;
- ✓ To have permanent consultations on new developed quality assurance procedure to National Council of Rectors.

Strategic Objective 2.4 - raising the assessment activities at an international scale

- ✓ To develop an appropriate system of recruitment and selection of international experts;



- ✓ To adapt and translate all assessment and report procedures in English;
- ✓ To foster alliances with agencies and institutions who share similar interests;
- ✓ To develop an adequate training of Romanian and international experts to work in international teams.

Strategic Objective 2.5 - developing of new external quality assurance methods

- ✓ To develop, piloting and possible implementation of new forms of external quality assurance procedures;
- ✓ To propose a new method of conducting institutional evaluation, discussed in a public consultation with universities, and then tested;
- ✓ To develop and discuss for new methods of external quality assurance of new modes of study, such as, for example: joint programmes, dual studies etc.

Strategic Area 3 - Maintaining the national and international recognition achieved

Strategic objectives in this area are oriented mainly at maintaining international position of ARACIS and using the opportunities resulting from international cooperation.

Strategic Objective 3.1 - active acting as member in international organisations promoting higher education quality

- ✓ To submit compliance with international standards to external review and cyclical evaluation;
- ✓ To activate in global and European organisations of accreditation agencies: INQAAHE, ENQA, ENAEE, CEENQA, etc.;
- ✓ To participate in projects carried out by the European organisations and active participation in events and initiatives taken by them.
- ✓ To increase society's awareness of the importance of the work the Agency does.

Strategic Objective 3.2 - intensifying publishing activity aimed at the promotion of ARACIS in an international arena



- ✓ To publish the innovative experiences using the means addressed to international recipients, such as conferences and articles in journals devoted to the sector QA;
- ✓ To provide a space in QAA Review in which innovation of quality assurance can be presented with full respect to existing quality assurance systems.

Strategic Objective 3.3 - maintaining formal status of ARACIS in an international arena

- ✓ To maintain the existing status of ARACIS as an organisation with international presence, thanks to its registration in EQAR and membership in ENQA, CEENQA, ENAEE;
- ✓ To review of ARACIS's operations by adopting the recommendations as the result of subsequent external reviews.

Strategic Area 4 – Management

- ✓ To maintain the internal management system in place as a means of supporting planning, follow-up, and decision-making;
- ✓ To periodically gather and analyze relevant information reflecting the requests and suggestions of stakeholders involved in higher education;
- ✓ To adapt ARACIS's work to user requirements;
- ✓ To get access to information that is pertinent, clear, comprehensive, and up-to-date;
- ✓ To systematize the dissemination of the ARACIS's work and results.