

## Guide on conducting the process for setting up (establishment) of a new doctoral study domain (authorisation)

### 1. Legal framework

1.1. The external evaluation process of doctoral study domains is based on the provisions of the following normative act:

- Law of National Education No 1/2011, with subsequent amendments and additions (in particular, Title III - Higher Education, Chapter III – Organization of University Studies, Section 12 – Third cycle – Doctoral studies, Articles 158 and 159, but also Articles 160-170);
- Romanian Government Decision No. 681 of 29 June 2011 on the approval of the *Code of Doctoral Studies*, with subsequent amendments and additions;
- Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance of Education, approved with amendments and additions by Law No 87/2006, with subsequent amendments and additions (in particular Articles 10, 13 and 29);
- Order 3651 of 12.04.2021 of the Minister of Education to approve the Methodology for evaluation of doctoral studies and the systems of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation and the systems of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation.

1.2. The process of periodic external evaluation or accreditation for the doctoral study domains, as appropriate, shall be carried out under the provisions of Article 158 para. (2) – (5) of the Law of National Education No. 1/2011 with subsequent amendments and additions, and involves the following steps:

a) The evaluation of the organization framework, namely “the institution organizing doctoral study programs (IOSUD)” organised under the terms of Article 132 paragraph (1) of Law No 1/2011, with subsequent amendments and additions, on the basis of the provisions of Art. 13 let. a) - c) of the Government Emergency Ordinance No 75/2005 on the Quality Assurance of



Education, approved with amendments by Law No 87/2006, with subsequent amendments and additions;

b) evaluation of the doctoral study domains in which the doctoral study programs are organised.

1.3. The doctoral study domains' evaluation is carried out for the purpose of the accreditation or the maintaining of the accreditation; this guide sets out how the evaluation is carried out for accreditation.

1.4. The evaluation for the purpose of setting up a new doctoral study domain can be requested:

a) for accreditation directly, when the applicant IOSUD meets the requirements stipulated at art. 29, para. (4<sup>2</sup>) of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005, approved as amended by Law no. 87/2006, as further amended and supplemented;

b) for a provisional authorising to operate, when the applicant IOSUD does not meet the requirements set forth at art. 29, para. (4<sup>2</sup>) of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005, approved as amended by Law no. 87/2006, as subsequently amended and supplemented.

1.5. The newly established doctoral study domain can be integrated:

a) in an existing doctoral school;

b) in a new doctoral school, established based on the provisional authorising to operate or the accreditation of the doctoral study domain.

1.6. Before establishing a new doctoral study domain that is not listed in the List of higher education domains and specialisations/study programs, the qualification pertaining to that new domain shall be listed and registered in the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (RNCIS), managed by the National Qualifications Authority (ANC), upon request of the interested IOSUD.

1.7. For the activity of evaluation of doctoral study domains, the Agency co-opts students – doctoral students as a rule - and international experts.

1.8. The external evaluation for the purpose of setting up a new doctoral study domain shall be conducted by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) or by another, foreign quality assurance agency registered with EQAR (The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education), hereinafter referred to as the Agency, on a



contract basis.

## 2. Steps of the external quality evaluation process for the establishment of a new doctoral study domain

The process of periodic external evaluation of doctoral study domains implies the following successive steps:

Step	Name, description and deadlines of the step
<p><b>Step 1</b></p>	<p><b>The IOSUD submits the Evaluation Request and the evaluation process begins</b></p> <p>The education provider submits to ARACIS an application requesting to initiate a doctoral study domain's periodic external evaluation process, as per the model provided by the agency. The IOSUD shall nominate a person in charge/responsible to coordinate the process of evaluation of that doctoral study domain, who shall be mentioned in the application requesting initiation of the external evaluation process for the doctoral study domain. ARACIS will send the evaluation contract to the education provider within 7 days<sup>1</sup> from receiving the application to initiate the evaluation process.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>within 7 days from receiving the application to initiate the evaluation procedure, ARACIS shall send the evaluation contract to the education provider.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 2</b></p>	<p><b>Submitting the internal evaluation report of the doctoral study domain</b></p> <p>No later than 30 days after signing the evaluation contract, the education provider shall submit to ARACIS, in electronic format, by publishing it in the ARACIS cloud, the Internal Evaluation Report accompanied by the Annexes, drawn up according to Annex 2 of this Guide.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>30 days after signing the evaluation contract.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 3</b></p>	<p><b>Establishing the Expert Panel's composition and setting the date and the program of the evaluation visit</b></p> <p>The Accreditation Department shall appoint the Experts Panel according to the proposals received from the Permanent Speciality Commission in charge<sup>2</sup> of the doctoral study domain.</p>

<sup>1</sup> The deadlines stipulated in this guide are expressed in calendar days.

<sup>2</sup> For a doctoral study domain that was not present in the List of higher education domains and specialisations/study programs, the BEX shall decide on assigning the new domain to a Permanent



Step	Name, description and deadlines of the step
	<p>The composition of the Experts Panel is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an expert evaluator – member of the academic staff listed in the National Register of Evaluators (RNE) having the status of doctoral advisor in the same doctoral study domain as the one undergoing evaluation<sup>3</sup> – who is also the Coordinator of the Experts Panel;</li> <li>• an expert evaluator – member of the academic staff listed in the National Register of Evaluators (RNE) having the status of doctoral advisor in the same doctoral study domain as the domain undergoing evaluation;</li> <li>• an international expert – preferably a doctoral advisor in the same university doctoral study domain as the one undergoing evaluation, member of the ARACIS International Evaluators’ Register, operating outside Romania;</li> <li>• one student, usually a doctoral student, appointed by the student members in the ARACIS Council<sup>4</sup> – member of the National Register of Student Evaluators (RNE-S), preferably having studied in the doctoral study domain undergoing evaluation.</li> </ul> <p>When nominating the members of the Experts’ Panel, observing the principles of equal opportunities and gender equality is recommended.</p> <p>The program of the evaluation visit shall be established by the coordinator of the Experts’ Panel, by consultation of all the members of the Experts’ Panel and of the IOSUD proposing the setting up of the doctoral study domain under evaluation.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i> - <i>no later than 25 days after signing the evaluation contract.</i></p>
Step 4	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Analysis of the internal evaluation report and request for clarifications/additional information</b></p> <p>Within maximally 7 days after submission by the applicant institution of its Internal Evaluation Report of the doctoral study domain, this report, together with its annexes shall be published in the ARACIS cloud in digital format to be sent to all the members of the Experts’ Panel. The ARACIS speciality inspector who provides technical support to the Permanent Speciality Commission in charge with that domain will make sure that the report is complete and that all the members of the Experts’ Panel have access to it. The Experts’ Panel shall analyse the Internal Evaluation Report and, if</p>

Speciality Commission.

<sup>3</sup> For a doctoral study domain that was not present in the List of higher education domains and specialisations/study programs and for which there are no doctoral advisors members in the RNE, doctoral advisors in similar domains shall be co-opted.

<sup>4</sup> If there are no students members of the National Register of Student Evaluators for that doctoral study domain or if those members cannot attend the evaluation mission, a doctoral student studying in a similar domain or a student who has completed master’s studies in that domain, or a student enrolled for master’s studies in that domain will be appointed.



Step	Name, description and deadlines of the step
	<p>necessary, may request the evaluated institution to provide clarifications or additional information about the elements referred to in the report.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>for sending the reports to the members of the Expert Evaluators' Panel: 7 days;</i></li> <li>- <i>for analysing the Internal Evaluation Report and sending the request for clarifications: no later than 30 days from sending the Internal Evaluation Report to the members of the Experts' Panel;</i></li> <li>- <i>for IOSUD's answer: no later than 15 days from e-mailing of the note with any clarification requests.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 5</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Carrying out of the evaluation visit</b></p> <p>The Experts Panel shall carry out a 2 - 3 days evaluation visit to the requesting institution and verify the truthfulness of the information contained in the Internal Evaluation Report and the compliance with the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators approved by the <i>Order of the Minister of Education and Research No. 3651 of 12.04.2021 regarding the approval of the Methodology for evaluating doctoral studies and the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation</i>, included in Annex 4<sup>5</sup> of the Guide. During the evaluation visit, the Panel will hold discussions with the representatives of the education provider and students, academic staff, employers or other stakeholders. Annex 1 contains <i>Recommendations on the activities to be carried out during the visit of the Experts' Panel for evaluating a doctoral study domain for accreditation</i>.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>no later than 15 days after receiving the reply with further clarifications/additional information from the IOSUD or after the period for analysing the Internal Evaluation Report for the purpose of requesting further clarifications/additional information has expired, if no clarifications/additional information was requested.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 6</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Drafting the External Evaluation Report</b></p> <p>The Experts' Panel will draw up an External Evaluation Report, in Romanian, as per the model provided in Annex No. 3 of this Guide, containing the findings made following the evaluation process on the compliance with the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators set out in Annex no. 4 of the Guide, as well as recommendations for enhancing future activity of the respective domain. The Experts' Panel will analyse the aspects targeted by the indicators, by taking into account that the doctoral study</p>

<sup>5</sup> According to art. 13, para. (2) of the Methodology for evaluating doctoral studies and the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation, approved by the *Order of the Minister of Education and Research No. 3651 of 12.04.2021 regarding the approval of the Methodology for evaluating doctoral studies and the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation*, ARACIS establishes the indicators that apply for the accreditation process.



Step	Name, description and deadlines of the step
	<p>domain is new, and by making a differentiated analysis, depending on whether the domain will be set up within an existing doctoral school or within a new doctoral school that will be set up.</p> <p>The international expert will draw up a separate report in English, with the same objectives, focusing, however, on those aspects that relate to the analysis of the status quo and on the recommendations. The international expert's findings, conclusions and recommendations will also be integrated in the External Evaluation Report.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no later than 10 days after completion of the evaluation visit for the drafting of the international expert's report;</li> <li>- no later than 15 days after completion of the evaluation visit for the drafting of the Experts' Panel's report.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 7</b></p>	<p><b>Submitting the External Evaluation Report to the IOSUD and drawing up an answer by the evaluated institution</b></p> <p>The coordinator of the Experts' Panel sends the external evaluation report to the IOSUD that includes the doctoral study domain undergoing evaluation. The evaluated institution shall formulate and communicate to ARACIS its point of view on the external evaluation report, which may include observations concerning any material errors contained in the report.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no later than 7 days after completion of the external evaluation report, for sending the report to the IOSUD;</li> <li>- no later than 15 days after receiving the external evaluation report, for the IOSUD to send back its answer.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 8</b></p>	<p><b>Finalising the External Evaluation Report and analysis in the Permanent Speciality Commission</b></p> <p>The Experts' Panel completes the External Evaluation Report and integrates the observations received, if applicable, and makes proposals regarding the decision on the compliance or the failure to comply with the quality standards. The ARACIS Permanent Speciality Commission in charge of the doctoral study domain undergoing evaluation analyses the External Evaluation Report and proposes a decision to the ARACIS Council. The decision of the Permanent Speciality Commission is included on the record in a document (Minute) signed by all its members.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no later than 30 days after receiving the answer from the education provider, but no later than the first upcoming meeting of the ARACIS Council.</li> </ul>



Step	Name, description and deadlines of the step
<p><b>Step 9</b></p>	<p><b>The ARACIS Council analyses the proposed decision and makes the final decision</b></p> <p>The ARACIS Council analyses the proposal of the Permanent Speciality Commission and makes the final decision, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grants the accreditation or the provisional authorisation to operate, as applicable, if the quality standards are met;</li> <li>• does not grant the accreditation or the provisional authorisation to operate, as applicable, if it is ascertained that the quality standards are not met.</li> </ul> <p>The granting of the accreditation or, as applicable, the provisional authorisation to operate results in the setting up of the new doctoral study domain.</p> <p>The decision of the ARACIS Council shall be communicated to the evaluated institution and published on the Agency's website within 5 days after being adopted.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- for the ARACIS Council decision, no later than 30 days after receiving the answer from the education provider;</li> <li>- for informing the evaluated institution, no more than 5 days after the decision of the ARACIS Council.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 10</b></p>	<p><b>Appeals/Complaints</b></p> <p>If the evaluated institution finds procedural flaws or disagrees with the ARACIS decision, it may file an Appeal, no later than 14 days after receiving the decision of the ARACIS Council.</p> <p>In case the evaluated institution identifies irregularities in observing the ethics and professional conduct rules by the Experts' Panel members or the inspectors from the technical staff of ARACIS, such irregularities may be notified within 5 days after the higher education institution receives the composition of the Experts' Panel, respectively 5 days after completion of the evaluation visit or after the occurrence of the notified events, by filing a Complaint.</p> <p>Appeals and Complaints shall be settled according to the specific procedures of ARACIS<sup>6</sup>.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- for appeals, no later than 14 days after receiving the letter communicating the result of the evaluation;</li> <li>- no later than 5 days after ascertaining the irregularity related to a breach of the ethics and professional conduct norms.</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Procedura-operationala.-Solutionarea-contestatiilor-depuse-de-institutiile-de-invataman-superior-APPEALS-P.O.-10-ARACIS.pdf>



Step	Name, description and deadlines of the step
<p><b>Step 11</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Communication of the decision to the ME</b></p> <p>The Agency shall inform the Ministry of Education (ME) of the decision made as a result of the periodic external evaluation process.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>no later than 5 days after the expiry of the deadline for filing an Appeal or from the solving of the Appeal/ Complaint and adopting the final decision.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 12</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Follow-up evaluation activities</b></p> <p>The purpose of this step is to enable the Agency to support the IOSUD in improving the quality of the education and research/innovation activities carried out within the newly established doctoral study domain, as well as to monitor the extent to which the recommendations made during the periodic external evaluation process are implemented by the evaluated institution, and check whether the aspects related to the partially met or failed indicators ascertained in the initial evaluation have been corrected.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>two years after the issuing of the accreditation decision or the decision for a provisional authorisation to operate, to assess the progress of the evaluated institution against the recommendations made by the Agency.</i></li> </ul>

### 3. Drawing up of the Internal Evaluation Report

**3.1.** The Internal Evaluation Report of a doctoral study domain will be drafted according to the template proposed in *Annex no. 2 - Structure of the Internal Evaluation Report for the setting up of a new doctoral study domain*.

**3.2.** The Internal Evaluation Report is based on the mechanisms of the internal quality assurance process and shall cover: the type of doctoral study programs, the research/development and innovation activities, the interaction and social impact and the contribution to the local/regional development, the support and services provided to students, the professional development of doctoral advisors and auxiliary staff. When applicable, the information shall be presented gender-wise.

**3.3.** The Internal Evaluation Report, together with all related Annexes, will be validated by the Council of the Doctoral School, respectively by the Council of the University Doctoral Studies and will be available for public consultation in electronic format on the IOSUD's website.

**3.4.** The Internal Evaluation Report of Doctoral Study Domains shall be





drawn up and submitted to ARACIS in Romanian and English and its Annexes shall be drawn up in Romanian or English.

#### 4. Drawing up of the External Evaluation Report

**4.1.** Within a maximum of 30 days after completing the evaluation visit, the Experts' Panel shall draw up an External Evaluation Report containing the findings of the evaluation process on the fulfilment of the criteria, standards and performance indicators set out in Annex no. 4 of this Guide. The international expert will draw up a separate report for that doctoral domain, no later than 15 days after completing the evaluation visit, in English, pursuing the same objectives. The Experts' Panel shall integrate in its report the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the international expert. The final form of the external evaluation report will include, if applicable, the observations received from the IOSUD concerning any material errors.

**4.2.** The template of the External Evaluation Report is attached to this Guide (*Annex no. 3 - Template for the External Evaluation Report of a DSD*).

**4.3.** The External Evaluation Report shall contain judgements on each performance indicator, establishing whether each indicator is unfulfilled, partially fulfilled or fulfilled. An indicator shall be considered partially fulfilled if the indicator was not fully fulfilled, but the deficiencies can be remedied within a period not exceeding 3 years, namely the period until the intermediate/follow-up visit. The External Evaluation Report shall contain the decision proposals put forward by each member of the Experts' Panel.

**4.4.** The external evaluation report shall contain recommendations for improving the activity of the IOSUD under evaluation, which must be provided for all indicators considered to be partially fulfilled or not fulfilled.

**4.5.** The External Evaluation Report on the doctoral study domain (both the report of the Experts' Panel and the international expert's report, without the Experts Panel's members' proposals for decisions) shall be published on the ARACIS website once the ARACIS Council has adopted the final decision (and after any appeals are solved, if applicable). The Report shall include the names of the members of the Experts' Panel.



## 5. The results of the periodic external evaluation process of doctoral study domains

**5.1.** In the case of an external evaluation for the purpose of setting up a new doctoral study domain, finding compliance with the quality standards shall result, as applicable, in granting accreditation or provisional authorisation to operate for that domain.

Granting the accreditation of the provisional authorisation to operate is proposed in the following situations:

- A. All the performance indicators have been evaluated as fulfilled;
- B. Maximum 5 performance indicators were evaluated as partially met, if all indicators in the category of critical indicators presented in *Annex no. 4 - Performance indicators and critical performance indicators for the external evaluation for the setting up (establishment) of a new doctoral study domain* have been assessed as fulfilled.

**5.2.** The finding that the standards have not been met results in not granting the accreditation or the provisional authorisation to operate for the doctoral study domain.

The finding that the standards are not met is adopted in the following circumstances:

- A. A performance indicator was assessed as not fulfilled;
- B. No more than 5 performance indicators have been assessed as partially fulfilled, if any indicators in the category of critical indicators have been assessed as partially fulfilled;
- C. No less than 6 performance indicators have been assessed as partially fulfilled.

**5.3.** In the case of the setting up of a new doctoral study domain, after receiving the accreditation, the IOSUD has the obligation to request periodic evaluation of that domain within 5 years.

**5.4.** In the case of the setting up of a new doctoral study domain, after it is provisionally authorised to operate, the IOSUD has the obligation to request accreditation of that domain within 1 year after awarding the first doctoral title to a student graduating from that domain.



## 6. Intermediate evaluation activities (follow-up process)

**6.1.** The purpose of the intermediate evaluation is to enable the Agency to support the IOSUD in improving the quality of the education and research/innovation activities carried out in doctoral education, as well as to monitor the extent to which the recommendations made during the external evaluation process are implemented by the evaluated institution, and check whether the aspects related to the partially fulfilled indicators have been corrected.

**6.2.** In the case of a decision to grant accreditation or provisionally authorise the institution to operate, the evaluated institution shall send ARACIS a progress report, no later than two years after the evaluation, with details about how the recommendations have been implemented.

**6.3.** The report will be reviewed by an intermediate evaluation panel consisting of an expert evaluator, a student and an ARACIS specialty inspector from the Quality Assurance Direction of ARACIS, usually the experts who were involved in the initial evaluation process. If the progress report is inconclusive, the intermediate evaluation panel requests the evaluated institution to provide clarification, and the panel may conduct a 1-2-day on-site visit, the cost of which shall be covered by the education provider.

**6.4.** After the evaluation commission reviews the progress report and after the intermediate evaluation visit is performed, if applicable, the commission shall draft a progress report and formulate new recommendations, if necessary. The progress report shall be approved by the ARACIS Council, sent to the evaluated institution, and published on the ARACIS website.