

Guide on conducting the process of renewal of accreditation of Doctoral Study Domains (DSD)

1. Legal framework

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

- **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 periodical 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, named as “the institution organizing doctoral study programs (IOSUD)” organized 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 organized.

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

1.4. According to the law, if a doctoral study domain is organized by several Doctoral Schools within the same institution organizing doctoral study programs (IOSUD), the evaluation is carried out only once at the IOSUD level.

1.5. In evaluating IOSUD, the Agency co-opts doctoral students and international experts.



1.6. The periodic external evaluation of doctoral study programs shall be carried out every five years by domains of doctoral studies by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) or by another quality assurance agency abroad, registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), from now on referred to as the Agency, on a contract basis.

2. Successive stages/steps in the process of Doctoral Study Domains Periodic External Evaluation

2.1. The doctoral study domains' periodic external evaluation process involves the following successive stages of work:

Step	Dead-line	<i>The name, description and deadlines of the step</i>
Step 1	7 days	<p>The IOSUD submits its Evaluation Request and the evaluation process begins</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 the respective doctoral study domain's evaluation, who shall be mentioned in the application</p> <p>Following the verification carried out by the <i>Service of Management of Evaluation Documents, Registration and Archive (SMDERA)</i>, the ARACIS Executive Board shall validate that the conditions necessary to start the evaluation process have been met and shall decide to initiate the external evaluation process no later than 7 days after receipt of the application for evaluation. The decision is communicated in writing to the education provider, together with the evaluation contract for signing. If the ARACIS Executive Board (BEX) finds that the conditions for initiating the external evaluation procedure have not been met, it shall communicate this to the requesting institution.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Within 7 days of receipt of the application to initiate the evaluation procedure, ARACIS shall send the evaluation contract to the education provider.</i>
Step 2	44 days	<p>Submitting the Internal Evaluation Report of the Doctoral Study Domain</p> <p>No later than 30 days after signing the evaluation contract, the education provider shall submit to ARACIS, in electronic format, by publishing in the ARACIS cloud, the Internal Evaluation Report accompanied by the Annexes, drawn up in accordance with Annex 2 of the present Guide.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>no later than 30 days after signing the evaluation contract.</i>

Step	Dead-line	<i>The name, description and deadlines of the step</i>
Step 3	39 days	<p>ARACIS establishes the Experts Panel's composition, sets the date and the program of the evaluation/site visit</p> <p>The Accreditation Department, on proposals from the Permanent Specialty Commission in charge of the doctoral study domain, appoints the Experts Panel.</p> <p>The Experts Panel's composition is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 – who is also a Coordinator of the Experts Panel; • an international expert – preferably a doctoral advisor in the same university doctoral study domain as the one under review, member of the ARACIS International Evaluators' Register, operating outside Romania; • one doctoral student, member of the National Register of Student Evaluators (RNE-S), designated by the student members in the ARACIS Council¹, preferably having studied in the doctoral study domain undergoing evaluation <p>When nominating the members of the Experts' Panel it is recommended that the principles of equal opportunities and gender equality are observed.</p> <p>The program of the evaluation visit of shall be established by the coordinator of the Experts' Panel Mission director, by consultation of all the members of the Experts' Panel.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <p>- <i>setting the date of the visit and nomination of the members of the evaluation panel should be completed not later than 25 days after signing the evaluation contract.</i></p>
Step 4	43 days	<p>Analysis of the Internal Evaluation Report and request for clarification/additional information</p> <p>Within a maximum of 4 working days from the submission of the Internal Evaluation Report of the applicant institutions' doctoral study domain, this report, together with all attached annexes shall be forwarded in digital format in the ARACIS cloud, to all the members of the Experts' Panel, by allowing them access to this cloud. The specialty inspector who provides technical support to the Permanent Specialty commission in charge with the respective domain, should make sure that the report is complete and that all the members of the Experts' Panel have access to it².</p> <p>The Experts' Panel shall analyze the Internal Evaluation Report and it may ask the requesting institution for clarification or further information on the elements referred to in the report.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <p>- <i>for transmitting the reports to the members of the experts' evaluators' panel: 4 days;</i></p>

Step	Dead-line	The name, description and deadlines of the step
	<p>58 days</p> <p>73 days</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for analyzing the Internal Evaluation Report and submitting the request for clarification: no later than 15 days from the date of transmission of the Internal Evaluation Report to the Experts Panel's members; - for the IOSUD's response: no later than 15 days from the date of transmission by e-mail of the official request with any clarification requests.
<p>Step 5</p>	<p>88 days</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The conduct of the evaluation visit</p> <p>The Experts Panel shall carry out a 2 - 4 days evaluation visit to the requesting institution, verifying the compliance with the reality of the information referred to in the Internal Evaluation Report and the fulfillment of the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators set out in the Order of the Minister of Education and Research No. 3651 of 12.04.2021 regarding the approval of the <i>Methodology for evaluating university doctoral studies and the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation</i> and in Annex 4 of the Guide.</p> <p>During the evaluation visit, the Panel will hold discussions with representatives of the education provider and students, academic staff, employers or other stakeholders. In special situations, when the workload and complexity of the evaluation process so require, the visit period may be extended with the approval of ARACIS's Executive Board. Annex 1 contains recommendations on the activities to be carried out during the visit of the Experts' Panel for evaluating the doctoral schools under the framework of the external evaluation of IOSUD.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no later than 15 days after receiving the reply with further clarifications/additional information from the IOSUD or after the period of analyzing the Internal Evaluation Reports for requesting further clarification/information has expired, if they have not been requested.
<p>Step 6</p>	<p>98 days</p> <p>103 days</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Drafting the External Evaluation Report</p> <p>The Experts' Panel will draw up and submit to ARACIS an External Evaluation Report, in Romanian, as per Annex No.3 of the Guide, containing the findings made following the evaluation process on the fulfillment of 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 international expert will draw up a separate report, in English, with the same objectives. The international expert's findings, conclusions and recommendations will also be integrated into the External Evaluation Report.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no later than 10 days after the completion of the evaluation visit for the drafting of the report by the international expert; - no later than 15 days after the completion of the evaluation visit for drafting the Expert Committee's report.



Step	Dead-line	The name, description and deadlines of the step
Step 7	107 days 122 days	<p align="center">Submitting the External Evaluation Report to the IOSUD and drawing up an answer by the evaluated institution</p> <p>The coordinator of the Experts' Panel sends the external evaluation report to the IOSUD including the doctoral study domain undergoing evaluation. The evaluated institution should formulate and communicate to ARACIS its point of view/reply on the external evaluation report, which may include observations on any material errors.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no later than 4 days after verification and completion of the reports, where appropriate. - for the evaluated institution, no later than 15 days after it has received the external evaluation report for sending back the IOSUD' response.
Step 8	152 days	<p align="center">Finalizing the Analyzing External Evaluation Report and analysis within ARACIS' Permanent Specialty Commission</p> <p>The Expert' Panel completes the External Evaluation Report, integrating, if it is the case, the observations received, and making proposals regarding meeting or failing to meet quality standards. The ARACIS' Permanent Specialty Commission, in charge of the doctoral study domain undergoing evaluation, analyzes the report drawn up by the Experts Panel and the evaluated institution's response and shall propose a decision to ARACIS' Council. The decision of the Permanent Specialty Commission is stipulated in a document (Minutes) signed by all its members.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no later than 30 days after receipt of the education provider's reply, but not later than the first up-coming meeting of the ARACIS Council.
Step 9	152 days 157 days	<p align="center">The ARACIS Council analyzes the proposed decision and takes the final decision</p> <p>The ARACIS Council analyzes the proposal for decision received from the Permanent Specialty Commission and takes a final decision on maintaining accreditation/withdrawal of accreditation, as appropriate, for the doctoral study domain under review. The decision to withdraw the accreditation shall be taken in the event of a finding that quality standards have not been met.</p> <p>The ARACIS Council's decision shall be communicated to the evaluated institution and published on the Agency's website within 5 working days of its adoption.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no later than 30 days for the ARACIS Council's decision, no later than 30 days after receipt of the response of the education provider; within a maximum of 5 working days after the ARACIS' Council decision to inform the evaluated institution.
Step 10		<p align="center">Procedures for Complaints/Appeals</p> <p>If the evaluated institution finds procedural defects or deviations from the evaluation</p>

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		<p>procedure (Complaint) or disagrees with the ARACIS decision (Appeal) it can formulate a Complaint/Appeal - within a maximum of 14 days after it has received the ARACIS Council decision.</p> <p>In case the evaluated institution identifies flaws in observing ethics and professional conduct rules of the Experts' Panel members or of the specialty inspectors from the technical staff of ARACIS, it may formulate a Complaint, no later than 5 days after receiving by the HEI of the composition of the Experts' Panel, respectively 5 days after the evaluation visit was finalized or the occurrence of the events subject of the complaint formulated.</p> <p>The Appeals, respectively the Complaints, shall be resolved according to the ARACIS dedicated procedures.</p> <p>The appeal will be resolved following ARACIS's specific procedures.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for appeals: no later than 14 days after receipt of the letter communicating the ARACIS decision; - for complaints: no later than 5 days after the occurrence of flaw in observing ethics and professional conduct rules.
Step 11		<p style="text-align: center;">Communication of the decision to the ME</p> <p>The Agency shall inform the Ministry of Education (ME) of the decision taken following the periodic external evaluation process.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no later than 5 working days after the expiry of the deadline for appealing/complaining, and the adoption of the final decision.
Step 12		<p style="text-align: center;">The institution under review is requesting a new evaluation (step applicable only in case of findings that the quality standards have not been met)</p> <p>If the Agency has found that the quality standards of a doctoral study domain have not been met, the evaluated institution shall be required to apply for a new evaluation, carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency having conducted the previous evaluation within a maximum of one year. The new evaluation process will focus primarily on analyzing the partially met or not met performance indicators during the first evaluation and will involve the resumption of all stages/steps, under conditions similar to those described above. If the institution does not request a new evaluation from the Agency by the deadline, the report drawn up following the first evaluation becomes final and the domain undergoing evaluation goes into liquidation without the right to organize the admission process for new doctoral students.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no more than one year after the warning communicated by the ME.
Step 13		<p style="text-align: center;">Follow-up/Intermediate Evaluation activities</p> <p>The purpose of this sequence is to enable the evaluating agency to support IOSUD in the</p>

Step	Dead-line	<i>The name, description and deadlines of the step</i>
		<p>process of enhancing the quality of education and research/innovation carried out in doctoral university studies, but also to monitor the extent to which the recommendations made during the external evaluation process are implemented by the evaluated institution, i.e., to verify that the standards and criteria, not fulfilled (met) or partially fulfilled during the initial evaluation, are fulfilled.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - one year after the warning communicated by the ME in the event of finding a non-compliance with the standards (step 12); - no later than 3 years after the decision to maintain the accreditation has been issued, in order to assess the progress made by the institution under review on the recommendations made by the Agency; - no later than 4 years after the decision to maintain the accreditation has been issued, if the intermediate evaluation visit after 3 years has found that the performance indicators are still not met.

3. Drawing-up the Internal Evaluation Report of a Doctoral Study Domain

3.1. The Internal Evaluation Report of a doctoral study domain will be carried out following the template proposed in *Annex No. 2 – Structure of the Internal Evaluation Report of a 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. Each time, 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 Doctoral School 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 reference period for which the Internal Evaluation Reports will be drawn up will be the last five academic years, for the indicators relating to the cohorts of doctoral students, i.e., respectively the last five calendar years, for the indicators relating to the scientific research activity.

3.5. The Internal Evaluation Report of Doctoral Study Domain 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 the External Evaluation Report

4.1. Within a maximum of 15 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 fulfillment of the standards and criteria set out in Annex No. 4 of this Guide. The international expert will draw up a separate report, for the respective doctoral domain, no later than 10 days after completing of evaluation



visit, in English, pursuing the same objectives. The Experts' Panel shall integrate in the report the findings and recommendations of the international expert. The final form includes, if this is the case, observations regarding material errors received from IOSUD.

4.2. The External Evaluation Report template is attached to this Guide (*Annex 3 – Template for External Evaluation Report of DSD*).

4.3. The External evaluation report shall contain judgments on the fulfillment of each performance indicator; for each indicator it will be determined whether it is unfulfilled, partially fulfilled or fulfilled. An indicator shall be considered partially fulfilled if the indicator has not been 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 proposal for decision 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 subject to the evaluation process, binding on all indicators considered to be partially fulfilled or not fulfilled.

4.5. The doctoral study domain's External evaluation report, as well as the report of the international expert, (both the Committee's and the international expert's report, except for 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 following the resolution of the appeals, if applicable). The report shall mention 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 the periodic external evaluation of an existing, accredited doctoral study domain, finding compliance with the quality standards shall result in maintaining the accreditation (accreditation) of the domain concerned for a 5 years period.

Maintaining the accreditation is proposed in the following situations:

- A. All the indicators have been evaluated as met;
- B. All the performance indicators have been evaluated as met, except for those in the indicator category reported with an asterisk, in the evaluation process carried out under the terms of Article 12 of Annex No. 1 of the Order No. 3651 of 12.04.2021 on approval of the *Methodology for evaluating university doctoral studies and the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation*.
- C. A maximum of 12 performance indicators has been assessed as partially fulfilled, if all the critical indicators, as set out in *Annex No 4 – Indicators and Critical indicators related to periodic evaluation of Doctoral Study Domains* have been assessed as being fulfilled.

5.2. The finding of a non-achievement of the quality standards shall result in withdrawing the Doctoral Study Domain accreditation (conditional accreditation or no accreditation).

Failure to meet standards can be found in the following situations:

- A. A performance indicator has been assessed as not fulfilled, except for the indicators marked with an asterisk, in the evaluation process carried out under the conditions of Article 12 of Annex No. 1 of Order No. 3651 of 12.04.2021 on approval of the *Methodology for evaluating university doctoral studies and the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation*.
- B. A maximum of 12 performance indicators have been assessed as partially fulfilled if there are critical indicators, as per *Annex No. 4 – Indicators and Critical indicators*, that have been assessed as being partially fulfilled;
- C. A minimum of 13 performance indicators was assessed as partially fulfilled.

In this case, as a first step, the awarded rating is the conditional accreditation and the IOSUD operating the domain is warned by the Ministry of Education, based on the conclusions of the external evaluation and is given a maximum of **one year** to correct the identified deficiencies.

5.3. The warned IOSUD, within a maximum of **one year** after receiving the warning, is required to apply for a new evaluation conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency which carried out the previous evaluation, bearing the costs of the assessment. Otherwise, the evaluation report initially drawn up becomes final and the doctoral study domain concerned has its accreditation withdrawn (is non-accredited), going into liquidation, without having the right to organize an admission process for new doctoral students.

5.4. If the evaluation carried out at the IOSUD's request within the one- year period shows that quality standards have been fulfilled, the doctoral study domain shall receive accreditation (accreditation) for a period of five years.

5.5. If the evaluation carried out at the IOSUD's request within the one- year period shows that quality standards have not been fulfilled, the doctoral study domain accreditation is withdrawn (it is non-accredited), going into liquidation, without having the right to organize an admission process for new doctoral students.

5.6. The proposals for accreditation, conditional accreditation or non-accreditation will be adopted based on an inclusive assessment, typically in line with those referred to in points 5.1 and 5.2, respectively, considering the need for supporting the education provider to improve the quality of education and to demonstrate the progress achieved.

6. Intermediate evaluation activities (follow up process)

6.1. The purpose of this sequence is to enable the evaluating agency to support IOSUD in the process of enhancing the quality of education and research/innovation carried out in doctoral university studies, but also to monitor the extent to which the recommendations made during the external evaluation process are implemented by the evaluated institution, i.e., to verify that the standards and criteria not fulfilled or partially fulfilled during the initial evaluation are fulfilled.



6.2. In the case of a decision to maintain the accreditation, the evaluated institution will send ARACIS a progress report no later than **3 years** after the evaluation date, detailing how it has implemented the recommendations made.

6.3. The report will be reviewed by an intermediate evaluation panel consisting of an expert evaluator, a student and an ARACIS specialist inspector from the Direction of Quality Assurance of ARACIS who was usually involved in the initial evaluation process. If the progress report is inconclusive, the intermediate evaluation panel requires clarifications to the evaluated institution.

6.4. If, in cases (B) and (C), as defined in Article 5.1, following the intermediate evaluation visit after 3 years, it is found that the recommendations made have not been implemented, an intermediate evaluation will be carried out after a further year, with a 1 - 2 days on-site visit, the costs being paid by the education provider. The provisions of Article 6.3 shall be applied accordingly.

6.5. Following the analysis of the progress report by the intermediate evaluation committee panel and the intermediate evaluation visit, the panel will draw up its own progress report in which it shall make, if necessary, further recommendations. The progress report of the panel shall be approved by the ARACIS Council. The progress report shall be sent to the institution subject to the evaluation and published on the ARACIS website.

6.6. In case of failure to meet quality standards, resulting in a warning and a one-year period for correcting the reported problems, the evaluation process of the doctoral study domain shall be resumed, following the steps set out in Chapter 2, with the costs being covered by the education provider. If the visit carried out one year later shows that the quality standards have been fulfilled, the intermediate evaluation process should be conducted under Articles 6.2. – 6.5.

- ¹ In case in the National Register of Evaluators – Students for the respective doctoral studies domain there are no student experts or the existing ones are not available for the evaluation mission, it is possible to nominate one doctoral student in a related domain, or a doctoral student having graduated university masters' studies in the domain, or a master student in the domain.
- ² In case the evaluation is carried out as per Article IV of the Emergency Ordinance No. 22/2021 for amending and completing the Law of national education No.1/2011 and of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance of Education, this responsibility is that of the ARACIS specialist inspector from the Direction of Quality Assurance of ARACIS having been designated to provide technical support to the evaluation activity of IOSUD.