

Guide on conducting the process of External Evaluation of institution organizing doctoral study programs (IOSUD) (accreditation and renewal of accreditation)

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, as amended and supplemented subsequently (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, as appropriate, for doctoral university studies, shall be carried out under the provisions of Article 158 paragraphs (2) – (5) of the Law of National Education No. 1/2011 and involves the following steps:

a) The evaluation of the organization framework, named as IOSUD is carried out under the terms of the Article 132 para. (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 supplements.

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

1.3. The IOSUD evaluation is carried out in view of the accreditation or of maintaining accreditation; this guide sets out how the evaluation is carried out for maintaining the accreditation for universities, under the conditions set by Art. IV of the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 22/2021 regarding amendments and additions of the Law of National Education No. 1/2011 and of the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 75/2005 on the Quality Assurance of Education. The Guide applies as well to IOSUD organized as a university consortium or by consortia and partnerships legally established of a university or university consortium and research-development units.

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



1.5 The periodic external evaluation of IOSUD shall be carried out every five years by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) or by another quality assurance agency abroad, registered in EQAR (the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education), from now on referred to as the Agency, on a contract basis, within the process of periodic evaluation of IOSUD for maintaining accreditation. For universities, the periodic evaluation of IOSUD shall be carried out in the integrated context of the institutional evaluation of the higher education institution.

2. Successive stages/steps in the process of IOSUD's Periodic External Evaluation

2.1. The IOSUD's periodic external evaluation process involves the following successive stages of work:

Step	Dead-line	The name, description and deadlines of the step
Step 1	7 days	<p>The IOSUD submits its Evaluation Request and the evaluation process begins</p> <p>When the external evaluation of a higher education institution, which is also IOSUD, is initiated, the education provider submits to ARACIS an application to initiate also a periodic external evaluation process for IOSUD, drafted as per the model provided by the agency. In the case of a consortium/partnership, the application is forwarded by the institutional coordinator of the external evaluation process of the IOSUD. 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 its 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 IOSUD</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 External Quality Evaluation–Department, on proposals from the Permanent Specialty Commissions appoints the Experts’ Panel. The Experts Panel’s composition is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a mission director – member of the ARACIS Council; • a coordinator at IOSUD level of the Experts’ Panel - member of the academic staff listed in the National Register of Evaluators (RNE), having the status of doctoral advisor; • one doctoral student, member of the National Register of Student Evaluators (RNE-S), designated by the student members in the ARACIS Council; • one member expert evaluator for each fundamental science domain included in the university doctoral studies domains managed by the doctoral school/schools of the IOSUD, academic member of the National Evaluators’ Register (RNE), doctoral advisor in a university doctoral studies domain belonging to the fundamental science domain of the doctoral school/schools of the IOSUD; • an international expert – preferably a doctoral advisor in one of university doctoral studies domains managed by the doctoral school/schools of the IOSUD, member of the International Evaluators’ Register of ARACIS. <p>It is recommended that the principles of equal opportunities and gender be respected in the composition of the Experts’ Panel. BEX shall nominate a specialty inspector from the Direction for Quality assurance to provide technical support for evaluation activity. For universities, the period of the evaluation visit shall be the same as for the date of the institutional evaluation. The program of the evaluation visit of the IOSUD shall be established by the Mission director, together with the director of the Council of the University Doctoral Studies (CSUD) of the HE institution, by consultation of all the members of the Experts’ Panel.</p> <p><i>Deadline:</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.</p>
Step 4		<p>Analysis of the Internal Evaluation Report and request for clarification/additional information</p> <p>Within a maximum of four working days from the submission of the Internal Evaluation Report of the applicant institution¹, this report, together with all attached annexes shall be forwarded in digital format to all the members of the Experts’ Panel, by allowing them access to the ARACIS cloud. The specialty inspector who provides technical</p>

Step	Dead-line	The name, description and deadlines of the step
	<p>43 days</p> <p>58 days</p> <p>73days</p>	<p>support to the evaluation panel should make sure that the report is complete and that all the members of the panel have access to it.</p> <p>The Experts' Panel shall analyze the Internal Evaluation Report and it may ask the requesting institution for clarifications or further information on the elements referred to in the report.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for transmitting the reports to the members of the Experts' Panel: 4 days; - for analyzing the Internal Evaluation Report and submitting the request for clarifications: 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.
Step 5	88 days	<p style="text-align: center;">The conduct of the evaluation visit</p> <p>The Experts' Panel shall carry out a 2-4 day 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 No. 3651 of 12.04.2021 regarding the approval of the Methodology for evaluating university doctoral studies and the system of criteria, standards and performance indicators used in the evaluation and contained in Annex 4 of the guide.</p> <p>During the evaluation visit, the Experts' 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>Deadline:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no later than 15 days after receiving the reply with further clarifications/additional information's from the IOSUD or after the period of analyzing the Internal Evaluation Reports for requesting further clarifications/information's has expired, if they have not been requested.
Step 6		<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 this 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 IOSUD. The international expert will draw up a separate report, in English, with the same objectives.</p>



Step	Dead-line	The name, description and deadlines of the step
	<p>98 days</p> <p>103 days</p>	<p>The international expert's findings, conclusions and recommendations will also be integrated into the External Evaluation Report.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</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;
<p>Step 7</p>	<p>107 days</p> <p>122 days</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Submitting the External Evaluation Reports to the IOSUD and drawing up an answer to the evaluated institution</p> <p>The Director of the mission sends the director of CSUD the external evaluation report. 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.
<p>Step 8</p>	<p>152 days</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Analyzing the Experts Panel's reports within ARACIS' Department of External Quality Evaluation</p> <p>The Director of mission sends to the Experts' panel the point of view/reply on the external evaluation report received from the evaluated institution. The Experts' Panel draws up its final report, integrating, if this is the case, the observations it has received, and formulating proposals regarding fulfillment or failure to fulfill the quality standards. The Director of mission forwards the final form of the external evaluation report to the Department of External Quality Evaluation. The department analyses the report and proposes a decision to the ARACIS Council on maintaining/withdrawing accreditation for the evaluated IOSUD, which should be stipulated in a Minutes document 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.
<p>Step 9</p>		<p style="text-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 Department</p>

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	<p>152 days</p> <p>157 days</p>	<p>of External Quality Evaluation and takes a final decision on maintaining accreditation/withdrawal of accreditation, as appropriate, for the IOSUD 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"> - 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.
<p>Step 10</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Procedures for Complaints/Appeals</p> <p>If the evaluated institution finds procedural defects or deviations from the evaluation 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.
<p>Step 11</p>		<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	Dead-line	<i>The name, description and deadlines of the step</i>
Step 12		<p>The institution under review is requesting a new evaluation (<i>step applicable only in case of findings that the quality standards have not been met</i>)</p> <p>If the Agency has found and mentioned in the external evaluation report that the quality standards of a IOSUD 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 two years. The new evaluation process will focus primarily on analyzing the elements not met 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 IOSUD 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"> - <i>no more than two years after the warning communicated by the ME.</i>
Step 13		<p>Follow-up/Intermediate Evaluation activities</p> <p>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 met or partially met during the initial evaluation are met.</p> <p><i>Deadlines:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - two years after the warning communicated by the ME in the event of finding a non-compliance with the standards; - no later than 3 years after the decision to maintain the accreditation has been issued 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 indicators are still not met.

3. Drawing-up the Internal Evaluation Report

3.1. The Internal Evaluation Report of a IOSUD will be carried out following the template proposed in *Annex No. 2 – Structure of the Internal Evaluation Report of an IOSUD*.

3.2. The internal Evaluation Report is based on the mechanisms of the internal quality assurance 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 University Studies Council, 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 the IOSUD 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. In the case of a IOSUD periodic evaluation, within a maximum of 15 days after completing the evaluation visit, the Experts' Panel shall draw up and submit to the Director of mission 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 IOSUD, 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 IOSUD*).

4.3. The External Evaluation Report shall contain reviews/judgments on the fulfillment of each applicable 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**, the period until the intermediate/follow-up visit. The External Evaluation Report shall also contain the proposals for decisions of 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 External Evaluation Report of the IOSUD, as well as the report of the international expert, 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), except for the Experts' Panel members' proposals for decisions.

5. The results of the Periodic External Evaluation process of IOSUD

5.1. In the case of the periodic external evaluation of an IOSUD, finding compliance with the quality standards shall result in maintaining the accreditation (accreditation) of the domain concerned for 5 years.

Maintaining the accreditation is proposed in the following situations:

- A. All the indicators have been evaluated as fulfilled;
- B. All the indicators have been evaluated as fulfilled, 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 11 indicators has been assessed as partially met, if all the critical indicators, as set out in *Annex No 4 – Indicators and Critical indicators related to periodic evaluation of IOSUD* have been assessed as being fulfilled.

5.2. The finding of a non- fulfilling of the quality standards shall result in withdrawing the IOSUD accreditation

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

- A. An 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 11 indicators have been assessed as partially fulfilled if there are critical indicators, as per *Annex No 4 – List of Indicators and List of Critical indicators related to periodic evaluation of IOSUD*, that have been assessed as being partially fulfilled;
- C. A minimum of 12 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 two years to correct the identified deficiencies.

5.3. The warned IOSUD, within a maximum of two years 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 IOSUD 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 two years period shows that quality standards have been fulfilled, the IOSUD shall receive accreditation (accreditation) for a period of five years.

5.5. If the evaluation carried out at the IOSUD's request within the two years period shows that quality standards have not been fulfilled, the IOSUD 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. Follow up process/intermediate evaluation activities

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 accreditation, the evaluated institution will send ARACIS a progress report no later than three years after the evaluation date, detailing how IOSUD has implemented the recommendations made at the initial evaluation.

6.3. The report will be reviewed by an intermediate evaluation panel consisting of an expert evaluator, a student and a 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 IOSUD Progress Report by the Intermediate Experts' Panel and the intermediate evaluation visit, the Experts' Panel will draw up its own Progress Report in which it shall make, if necessary, further recommendations. The Progress Report shall be approved by the ARACIS Council. The Progress Report shall be published on the ARACIS website and sent to the institution subject to the evaluation.

6.6. In case of failure to meet quality standards, resulting in a warning and a two year period for correcting the reported problems, the evaluation process of the IOSUD 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 two years later shows that the quality standards have been fulfilled, the intermediate evaluation process should be conducted under Articles 6.2. – 6.5.

¹ All Internal evaluation reports, for both Doctoral Schools and Doctoral Studies Domains, drafted and forwarded according to the Order No. 3200/2020 *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* are considered valid and shall be taken into consideration for the evaluation process. The Internal evaluation reports of Doctoral Schools shall be used in the process of periodic evaluation of the IOSUD.