Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance
in Higher Education

Activity Report
ARACIS
2022

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Member of:

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ENQA

Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CEENQA

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

INQAAHE

European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

ENAEE

The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education

ECA

Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment

CoARA

Registered in:
European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

EQAR

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LIST OF ACRONYMS / ABBREVIATIONS

A	Accreditation
ANACEC	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova
ANC	National Authority for Qualifications
ANOSR	National Alliance of Students' Organisations in Romania
APO	Provisional authorisation to operate
ARACIP	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
ARACIS	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
BEx	Executive Board of the ARACIS Council
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group -BFUG (RO) Grupul de urmărire a procesului Bologna
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (RO) Rețeaua Central-Est Europeană a Agențiilor de Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior
CoARA	Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (RO) Coaliția pentru Dezvoltarea Evaluării Cercetării
CNATDCU	National Council for Attestation of University Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates
DEQAR	The "Database of External Quality Assurance Results" Project (RO) Proiectul „Baza de date a rapoartelor de asigurare externă a calității"
DRIPCC	International Relations, Projects, Cooperation and Research Direction
ECA	The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (RO) Consorțiul European pentru Acreditare în Învățământul Superior
EHEA	(RO) Spațiul European al Învățământului Superior - SEÎS European Higher Education Area - EHEA
ENAEE	European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (RO) Rețeaua Europeană pentru Acreditarea Educației în Inginerie
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RO) Asociația Europeană pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior
ENRF	External Non-reimbursable Funds
EP	Periodic evaluation
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (RO) Registrul European al Asigurării Calității în Învățământul Superior
ESF	European Social Fund
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RO) Standarde și linii directoare pentru asigurarea calității în Spațiul European al Învățământului Superior
ESQA	The "Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities" Project (RO) Proiectul „Implicarea efectivă a părților interesate în activitățile de asigurare externă a calității"
ESU	European Students' Union (RO) Uniunea Europeană a Studenților
ETER	European Tertiary Education Register (RO) Registrul European pentru Educație Terțiară
EUA	European University Association

	(RO) Asociația Europeană a Universităților
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
	(RO) Asociația Europeană a Instituțiilor de Învățământ Superior
GD	Romanian Government Decision
GEO	Romanian Government's Emergency Ordinance
GO/GEO	Government Ordinance / Government Emergency Ordinance
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
	(RO) Rețeaua Internațională a Agențiilor de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior
LC	EUR-ACE Label Comittee
	(RO) Comitetul de certificare EUR-ACE
MoE	Ministry of Education
NEEA	National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency
	(RO) Agenția Națională de Evaluare și Acreditare din Bulgaria
NEL	National Education Law
OG	Official Gazette of Romania
OGSG	Order of the Government's Secretariat General
OOR	Organisational and Operational Regulations
PASS	Public Administration Strengthening Strategy
QAFIN	Project "Improvement of public policies in higher education and better-quality regulations through updated quality standards"
QAR	Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education
	(RO) Revista pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior
REI	ARACIS Register of International Evaluators
RNE	National Register of Evaluators
RNE-S	National Register of Evaluators - Students
SCIM	Managerial internal control system
UEFISCDI	Executive Unit for Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation
UNSR	National Union of Students in Romania
USR	Romanian Students' Union

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Like all other institutions operating in the field of education, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) lately faced intense challenges, generated especially by the pandemic period; however, we tried to turn these challenges into opportunities to improve our activities and the services that we provide for our main partners, the Romanian universities. In fact, the first thought and the first message of this introductory note goes to our colleagues in higher education institutions in Romania, professors, students, and support staff working in the field of quality assurance, who, through their activity and the way in which they respond in the dialogue with ARACIS representatives, significantly contribute to improving the quality of higher education in Romania.

The key actors of the educational process pertaining to higher education in Romania – universities and the representative associative structure that is the CNR (National Rectors' Council), associations, students' unions and alliances, the representative higher education trade union (Alma Mater), employers, as well as the representatives of the Ministry of Education, agencies and institutions that have responsibilities in the field of higher education, contributed once again in 2022 to the key decisions and steps taken by ARACIS in its field of business. One relevant example to this comes from the consultations conducted both with respect to the quality standards regarding teaching, learning, research, practical works, and evaluation activities in full-time education by using specific electronic, IT and synchronous communication resources and the maximum shares of activities in synchronous online format, differentiated per bachelor study domains, master study domains and doctoral domains, and with respect to the Agency's strategy for 2022 – 2026.

2022 was the year when we were able to analyse the result of the process of evaluation of doctoral studies in Romania - a comprehensive process that was a novelty for the higher education system in Romania, which, by its magnitude, elicited great interest from many quality assurance agencies in Europe. At this moment, this evaluation mechanism has already been included in the own internal quality assurance mechanisms of universities that organise doctoral studies in Romania, and the unanimous opinion is that, through the indicators proposed and analysed, the evaluation process leads to an improved quality of doctoral studies and strengthens aspects related to compliance with academic ethics and integrity. Regarding this aspect, wishing to be always in line with the European trends in the field, ARACIS, together with other institutions and universities in Romania, joined the *Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment* (CoARA), whose aim is to achieve a systemic reform of research assessment based on shared principles and commitments, through exchange of information and mutual learning between all those who wish to improve research assessment practices.

As ARACIS operates by engaging a very large number of collaborators, members of teachers', students', employers, and international experts' evaluator registers, with more than 1600 expert evaluators in total, the way in which the Agency manages to communicate with its own expert evaluators and with the beneficiaries of the evaluation process becomes very important. Within this context, timely publication of the results of evaluations and of all decisions and changes to the Agency's own procedures, regulations or methodologies in a way that is easily accessible becomes extremely important and relevant. The ARACIS

website, as well as other means of communication (specialised groups per types of activities; the Facebook page; the LinkedIn account, etc.) have been significantly improved, thus contributing to the efficient dissemination of such information.

The Romanian higher education system has seen great progress in the recent years, and is extremely connected to the internal needs, as well as to what we define as the internationalisation of higher education, meaning both attracting foreign students to study in Romania, and internationalising the curriculum for both Romanian and international students. In this view, ARACIS develops policies to capture these aspects and support Romanian universities, and the representation of the Agency in the relevant international professional structures is extremely relevant in this context. Thus, ARACIS's presence as a member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education), ENAEE (European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education), CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), and its membership of or collaboration with the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), ECA (European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education), ESU (European Students Union), and the bilateral agreements with other quality assurance agencies (of Moldova, France, Hungary, Ukraine, etc.), as well as the Agency's participation in relevant European projects in the field of quality assurance lead us to be sure that all these international experiences will be reflected in the internationalisation process of Romanian universities.

An activity report focuses on activities that were realised, but drafting it also - or especially - gives us the possibility to think of the future. Besides the current activities that ARACIS will conduct, year 2023 comes with a particular significance, as it is the year when the Agency will be evaluated by ENQA. We are extremely motivated about this evaluation, and we are sure that the dialogue that we will have with the members of the evaluation team during the visit of the mission will give the Agency's representatives, as well as all members, representatives of stakeholder institutions that will attend these meetings the possibility to reflect on, and then implement the suggestions and proposals that we will receive for our main objective - to improve the quality of higher education in Romania.

Associate Professor Dr. Mădălin BUNOIU,
ARACIS President

MIISSION AND ATTRIBUTIONS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

Mission

ARACIS' mission is to carry out the quality external evaluation of education provided by higher education institutions and by other organisations providing higher education study programmes, which operates in Romania with the aim of:

- certifying, according to quality standards, the capacity of education providing organisations to fulfil the beneficiaries' expectations;
- contributing to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality;
- assuring the protection of direct beneficiaries of study programmes at higher education level by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent and credible information, publicly accessible, about education quality;
- proposing strategies and policies to the Ministry of Education (ME) in order to continuously improve the quality of higher education, closely correlated to the level of pre-university education.

Quality assurance attributions

- ✓ Regularly, based on best practices, formulates and reviews national reference standards and performance indicators for quality evaluation and assurance in higher education;
- ✓ Collaborates with the Ministry of Education and Research and ARACIS to develop and promote policies and action strategies to improve the quality of education in Romania;
- ✓ Organises annual consultations with higher education institutions to establish the priorities in quality assurance;
- ✓ Develops and publishes its own procedures for external quality evaluation in education;
- ✓ Concludes service contracts with national and foreign education institutions for the external evaluation of the quality of education programmes and providers specific to higher education, and for the inter-institutional evaluation of similar programmes;
- ✓ Carries out quality evaluation of higher education programmes and institutions, upon the request of the Ministry of Education; The terms for carrying out the evaluation activity are established by contract;
- ✓ Publishes the results of external evaluations;
- ✓ Publishes manuals, guides, summaries of best practice in quality evaluation and assurance;
- ✓ Regularly, every three years, develops system analyses on the quality of higher education in Romania;
- ✓ Works with similar agencies in other countries to develop and implement efficient measures for the improvement of the quality of higher education programmes;
- ✓ Develops the Code of Conduct of the ARACIS experts;
- ✓ Publishes an annual report on its own activity;
- ✓ Every three years, develops self-assessment reports evaluating the quality of its own activity, in preparation for external evaluations carried out by similar agencies of other countries.

FOREWORD

This ARACIS 2022 Activity Report seeks to present the tasks established for and the activities carried out by the Agency between 03.01.2022 – 30.12.2022.

The Report was structured and finalised by the Research Office within the International Relations, Projects, Cooperation and Research Direction (DRIPCC).

Representatives of all the structures in charge with decision-making, coordination, execution and control at ARACIS participated in developing the report and contributed with supporting information and documents presenting the activities carried out, and proposed future measures aimed at improving the internal quality assurance for the Agency's activities, namely:

Primary reporting and data processing: Ion Tănase – Economic Direction; Carmen Mirian – Quality Assurance Direction; Marinela Lolea and Aureliu Perdeleanu – Organisation, IT, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction; Adriana Popoiu - International Relationships, Project Implementation, Communication, and Events Service; Emilia Mircea and Gianina Buiuc - Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office.

Report analysis: Executive Board of the ARACIS Council: Associate Professor Dr. Octavian Mădălin Bunoiu - President; Professor Dr. Eng. Năvrăpescu Valentin - Vice-president; Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache - Director of the Accreditation Department; Professor Dr. Eng. Seghedin Neculai Eugen - Director of the External Quality Evaluation Department; Professor Dr. Eng. Cojocaru Dorian - Secretary General of the ARACIS Council; students Oana Țînțar and Ciprian Zamfir, members of the ARACIS Council; Professor Dr. Eng. Anton Hadăr, representative of the largest higher education union organisation in the ARACIS Council; Dr. Eng. Romeo-Cristian Erbaşu, employers' representative in the ARACIS Council.

Coordination and final drafting: Associate Professor Dr. Octavian Mădălin Bunoiu - ARACIS President; Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică – Director General; Associate Professor Dr. Emilia Gogu – Head of Research Office, and Corina Dumitriu – speciality inspector, Research Office.

The drafting group thanks all the members of the ARACIS Council and everyone who contributed to producing the final form of this report.

The report was analysed and approved in the ARACIS Council.

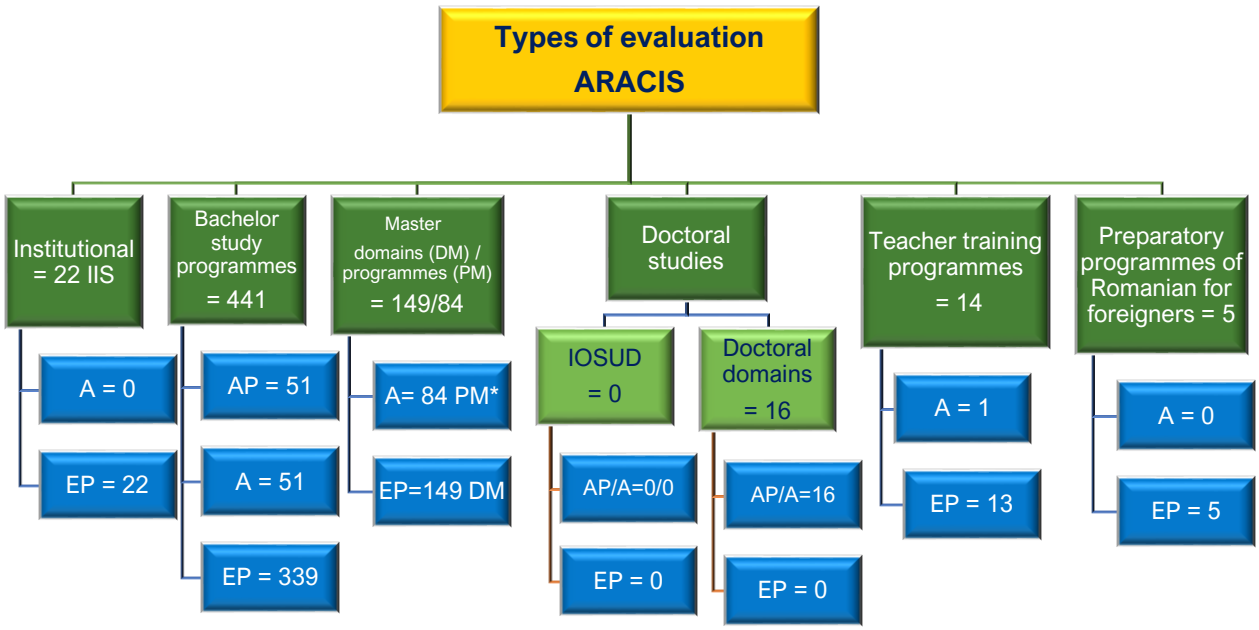
The Activity Report of ARACIS is published annually in Romanian and English language; the Report is public information, and is also available on the Agency's webpage: https://www.aracis.ro/rapoarte-interne-aracis/.

ARACIS ACTIVITY REPORT FOR YEAR 2022

In order to provide all stakeholders, structures and interested organisations, and the wider audience with a full picture of the activities of ARACIS, this report starts with a synopsis of statistic data on the results and external higher education quality evaluation activities carried out or completed by ARACIS in 2022, the existing human potential involved, and the Agency's participation in national/international projects.

The results of the activities of external evaluation of the quality of higher education carried out by ARACIS in 2022 are presented below in a synthetic form:

ARACIS activity in 2022 in figures



Key: AP- Provisional authorisation to operate; A- Accreditation; EP- Periodic evaluation.

Note: * out of which 77 for classification.

Figure 1. General summary of the external evaluations carried out by ARACIS in 2021

In terms of distribution, the number of external evaluations per types of evaluation at the level of the ARACIS Speciality Commissions is as follows:

C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 29 •Master domains evaluated = 12 •Master classification programmes = 4
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	• Evaluated bachelor programmes = 34 • Master domains evaluated = 7 • Master classification programmes = 10
C3 - Legal Sciences	• Evaluated bachelor programmes = 3 • Master domains evaluated = 11 • Master classification programmes = 4
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	• Evaluated bachelor programmes = 31 • Master domains evaluated = 12 • Master classification programmes = 2
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 25 •Master domains evaluated = 10 •Master classification programmes = 5
C6 - Economic Sciences I	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 25 •Master domains evaluated = 16 •Master classification programmes = 6
C7 - Economic Sciences II	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 22 •Master domains evaluated = 10 •Master classification programmes = 5
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 38 •Master domains evaluated = 10 •Master classification programmes = 9
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 25 •Master domains evaluated = 4 •Master classification programmes = 6
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 79 •Master domains evaluated =29 •Master classification programmes = 18
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 68 •Master domains evaluated = 21 •Master classification programmes = 10
C12 - Medical Sciences	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 30 •Master domains evaluated = 7 •Master classification programmes = 4
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 32 •Master classification programmes = 1

Figure 2. External evaluations performed by the ARACIS Speciality Commissions in 2022

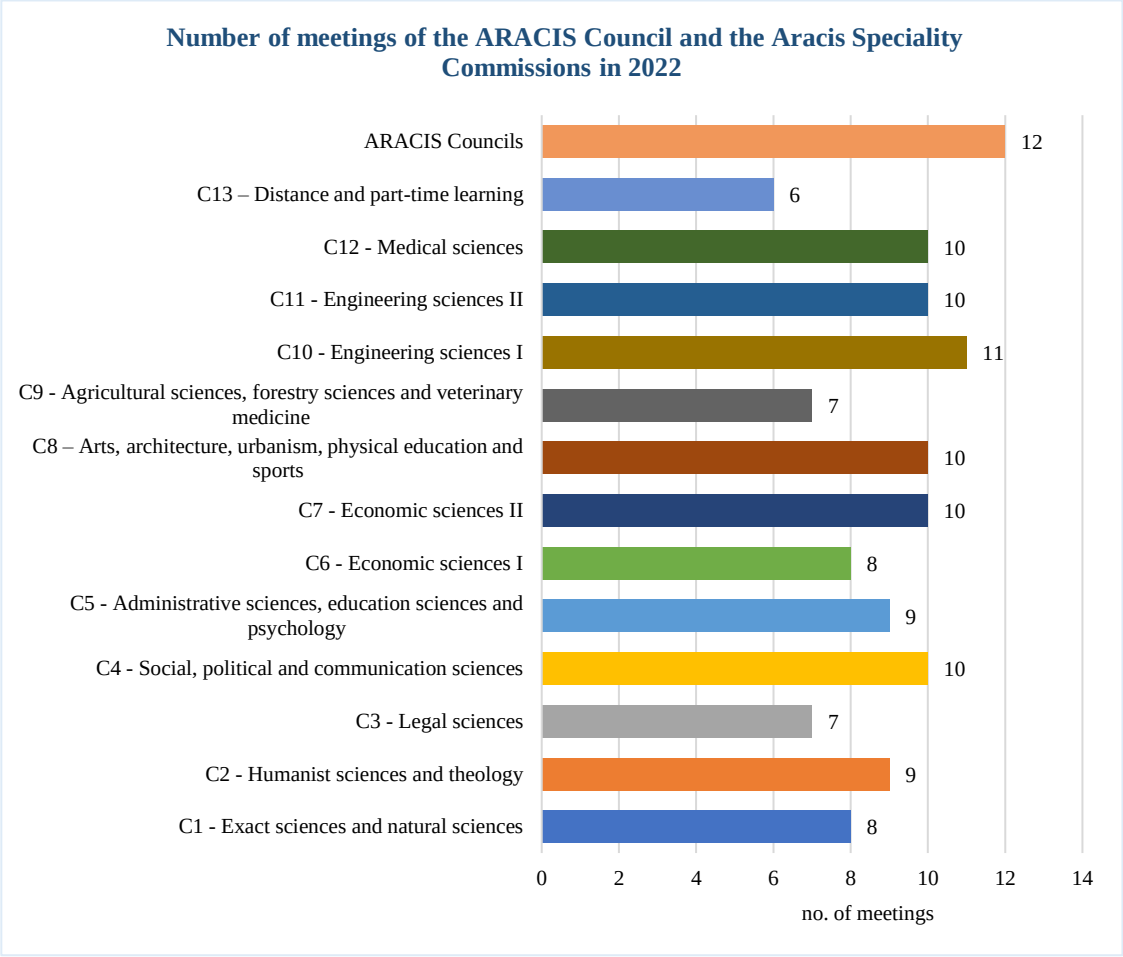


Figure 3. Number of meetings of the ARACIS Council and the ARACIS Speciality Commissions in 2022

The human potential registered on the ARACIS registers is 1923 people, and the general situation at the level of the Speciality Commissions and the registers is as follows:

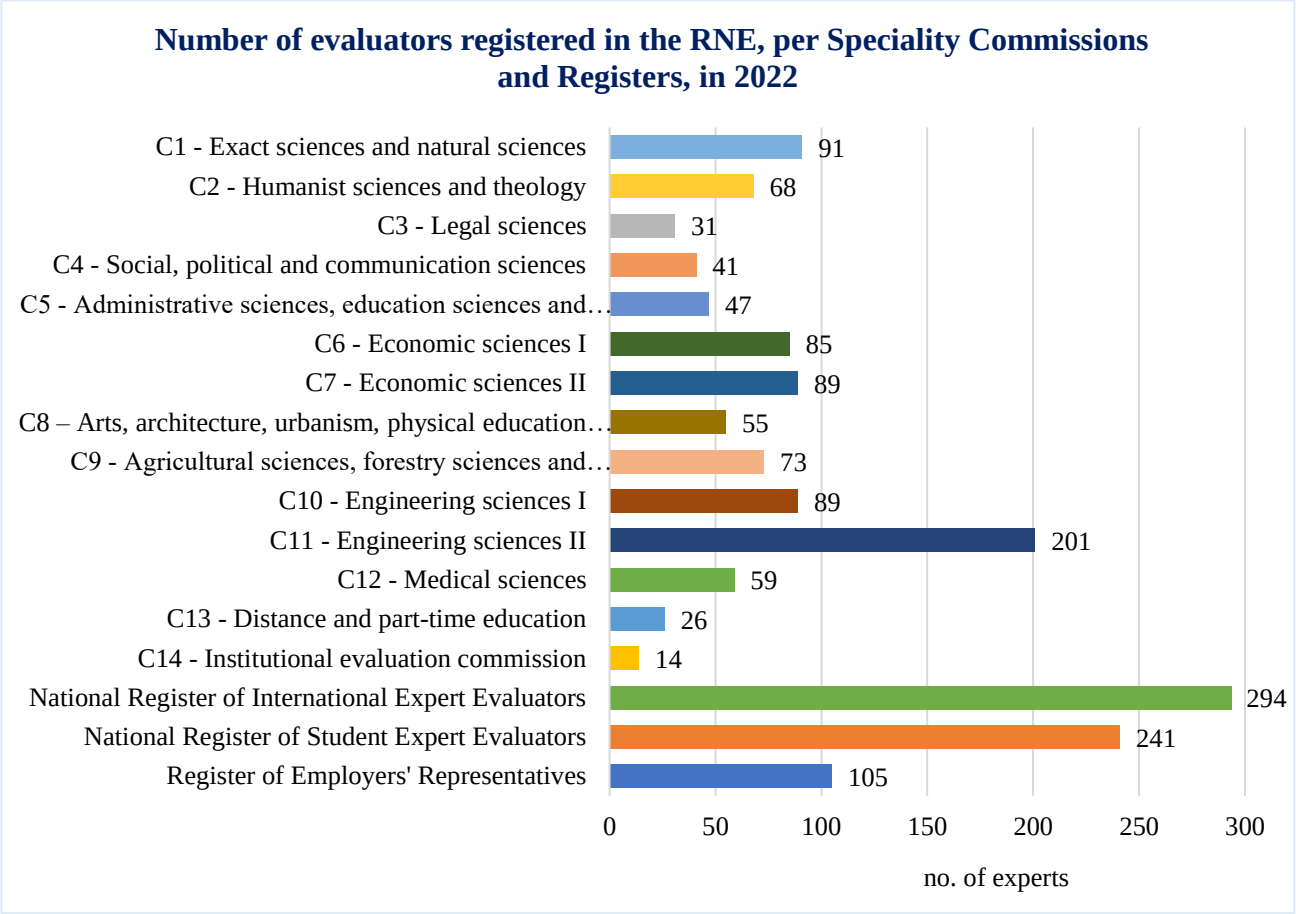


Figure 4. Number of evaluators registered in the RNE, per Speciality Commissions and Registers, in 2022

Furthermore, in 2022, ARACIS initiated the implementation of two international projects:

I. The IMINQA international project - **"**Implementation and Innovation in QA through peer learning (IMINQA)"

Project type: project co-funded under the ERASMUS+ Programme
Implementation period: 36 months (May 2022 – April 2025),
Budget: funding 499,855 EUR, out of which 43,642 EUR allocated to ARACIS.
This is an umbrella project developed to support the 2021-2024 proceedings of the Thematic Support Group C – Quality Assurance (created by the Bologna Follow-Up Group – BFUG).

II. The START international project – " Social inclusion, Tolerance, Acceptance and Realization for all sTudents "

Project type: project funded under the ERASMUS+ Programme, with ARACIS being a project partner.
Implementation period: 36 months, between June 2022 – May 2025.
The implementation of the START project is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria, together with the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Bulgaria (NEAA) and the Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants.

1 GENERAL ORGANISATION AND OPERATION ASPECTS

1.1 Background, legal framework, organisational structure and resources of ARACIS

1.1.1 Context

As a signatory member of the Bologna Declaration (1999), Romania has become part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Ensuring the quality of education is one of the main goals of the EHEA; to this purpose, in 2005, the ministers in charge with higher education have adopted the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area. These were drafted based on a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE) and the European Universities Association (EUA).

Considerable progress was achieved at European and national level after 2005, both in relation to quality assurance and along other lines of action within the Bologna Process, such as the framework of qualifications, the recognition and promotion of the using of the results of learning, which all contributed to a paradigm shift towards student-centred learning and teaching.

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ARACIS was created to evaluate quality assurance in education. The Agency is managed by the ARACIS Council (the Council).

The Agency operates on the grounds of the provisions of the national laws in force and of the Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS, (further on referred to as the Methodology or the Methodology for evaluation) approved by Government Decision (GD) no. 1418/2006, amended by GD 915/2017. The modification was necessary after the ministers in charge with higher education embraced the new Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area at the Conference in Yerevan, Armenia in 2015.

ARACIS is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this status.

ARACIS is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this registration.

ARACIS is also a member of other international organisations or networks of higher education quality assurance agencies (CEENQA, ENAEE, INQAAHE, ECA, and CoARA), and is represented in their management bodies.

1.1.2 Legal framework

The institutional articles of association and the activity of ARACIS are regulated at national level through the following normative documents:

- Romanian Government's Emergency Ordinance (GEO) no. 75/2005 on quality assurance of education, as subsequently amended and supplemented, approved by Law 87/2006;
- Romanian Government Decision (GD) no. 915/2017 modifying the appendix to GD no. 1418/2006 approving the Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS, further on referred to as the "Methodology";
- GD no. 1731/2006 to approve the tariffs charged by ARACIS for the authorisation and accreditation per study programmes of higher education institutions and for the external evaluation of the quality of education;
- The National Education Law (LEN) no. 1/2011, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- GD no. 369/2013 approving the Methodology for accreditation of Master's study domains based on the accredited Master's programmes;
- Orders of the Minister of Education concerning regulation of and/or capitalisation on some specific evaluation activities, which are drafted periodically.

In carrying out its activities, according to the law, ARACIS drafts and uses its own regulations, which are approved by the Council:

- Guidelines for quality evaluation activities of higher education programmes and higher education institutions;
- Guidelines for the periodical external evaluation of the Master's study domains;
- Code of ethics and rules of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS in assuring and evaluating the quality of higher education in Romania, further on referred to as the Code of Ethics;
- Specific standards for the external evaluation of the academic quality of Bachelor's and Master's programmes, used by the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions;
- Resolutions of the ARACIS Council and Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council (BEx) to address any current issues.

According to the provisions of the Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS, approved by GD no. 1418/2006 and amended by GD 915/2017, the Methodology provides the conceptual framework and describes the main activities and strategies envisaged in the authorisation/accreditation/periodical evaluation processes and the quality assurance and external quality evaluation processes. The operational and instrumental aspects are detailed in the Specific evaluation guidelines, further on referred to as the ARACIS Guidelines or the Guidelines, drafted by ARACIS in consultation with higher education institutions and other interested stakeholders and beneficiaries. The Guidelines, composed of several parts, are approved by the ARACIS Council. Depending on the developments concerning the requirements for quality assurance in higher education, the ARACIS Council may approve amendments and supplements to the Guidelines.

ARACIS is a body that is entitled by law to issue and propose opinions and recommendations to the MoE, based on its own assessments materialising its know-how/experience in the field; therefore, the ARACIS Guidelines and its appendixes are

recognised in Romania as specific reference norms and regulations in the field of higher education quality assurance. The Methodology and the Guidelines ensure alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, (hereinafter referred to as the ESG) (European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), approved in 2015 at the Yerevan Conference by the ministers in charge with higher education in the EHEA, in which the quality assurance activities, policies and processes are explicitly defined.

Furthermore, ARACIS adapted its activities to the new pandemic context generated by the SARS-CoV-2 virus; to this purpose, in line with the laws in force, it has developed and approved the Guidelines based on which the external evaluation processes can be conducted in blended format , and external evaluations were performed for higher education studies/institutions.

1.1.3 The purpose of ARACIS activities

ARACIS performs the external evaluation of the quality of education provided by higher education institutions and education providers operating on the territory of Romania, and by Romanian education providers that legal operate on the territory of other states, according to the legal regulations in force in Romania, with the following purpose:

a) certify the capacity of the education providers to reach the quality standards and, thus, meet the expectations of their beneficiaries;

b) contribute to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality;

c) ensure the protection of direct and indirect beneficiaries of study programmes by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent, credible, public, accessible information on the quality of the education provided by higher education institutions;

d) propose strategies and policies to the line ministry (Ministry of Education) in order to continuously improve the quality of higher education, in close correlation with the pre-university education, the requests of employers, and the European and international practice;

e) contribute to internationally promoting the high-quality higher education provided in Romania;

f) ensure better correlation between the skills demanded on the labour market and the learning results-oriented education provision, in order to increase employment among new graduates, both nationally and in Europe.

The main goal of the activity of ARACIS in Romania is to ensure high-quality higher education and vocational training, in order to enable development of competitive human capital.

According to its international status as an EQAR-registered agency, the Agency can also evaluate the quality of education in higher education institutions abroad, upon the request of such institutions, subject to compliance with the legal regulations of that country.

1.1.4 Organisational structure

ARACIS is an autonomous, independent public institution of national interest, a legal entity that runs its own income and expenditure budget. ARACIS is fully funded through its own revenues.

In order to organise and achieve better efficiency of its activities, ARACIS has drafted its own Organisational and Operational Regulations (OOR), which were later reviewed, supplemented and approved in their new form by the ARACIS Council through its Decision no. 105 of 25/11/2021.

The organisational structure (Appendix 1 - Organisational structure) of ARACIS includes:

- The ARACIS Council, with the following subordinated structures:
  - ✓ Executive Board of the ARACIS Council;
  - ✓ the Quality External Evaluation Department;
  - ✓ the Accreditation Department;
  - ✓ Permanent Experts Commissions;
  - ✓ Commission of Institutional Evaluation for Managerial and Financial Activities;
  - ✓ Advisory Commission;
  - ✓ Ethics Commission.
- The technical structure of ARACIS is organised in four speciality directions:
  - ✓ Quality Assurance Direction;
  - ✓ Economic Direction;
  - ✓ Organisation, IT, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction;
  - ✓ International Relations, Projects, Cooperation and Research Direction.

Two Offices and one Compartment were set up within the technical structure of ARACIS, subordinated to the ARACIS president:

- ✓ President's Cabinet Office;
- ✓ Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office;
- ✓ Internal Public Audit Compartment.

The ***ARACIS Council*** is composed of 21 members, selected through a public contest according to ARACIS's own procedure that includes professional and scientific competence criteria, professional prestige, etc., out of which: 17 university professors and/or associate professors with full tenure, employed under permanent individual employment contracts, experienced in education quality assurance; two students, representatives of nationally representative student federations; one representative of the higher education union organisation and one employers' representative.

The Council is the collective management structure of ARACIS and ensures the programmatic direction of the Agency. It sits monthly in an ordinary meeting, and whenever necessary in extraordinary meetings, convened by the president or the vice-president (if the president is absent).

The Council carries out the responsibilities laid down in the ARACIS OOR (Annex 2. – Members of the ARACIS Council - 2022).

The ***Executive Board of the ARACIS Council*** (BEx) is the operative management structure of ARACIS, composed of the president, the vice president and the secretary general of the ARACIS Council, the director of the Quality External Evaluation Department and the director of the Accreditation Department. The BEx usually sits weekly in ordinary meetings, and whenever necessary in extraordinary meetings, convened by the president or the vice-president. The representatives of the student federations in the Council and the representative of the higher education union attend the BEx periodical meetings as guests.

The Quality External Evaluation Department and the Accreditation Department are composed of quality assurance experts - members of the Council, and each department is coordinated by a director. These departments sit periodically for analysis and debates on the evaluation of education programmes and institutional evaluations, respectively. As a result of the debates, the departments draft their own reports, submitted to the Council, with substantiated proposals concerning the extent of compliance of the evaluated study programmes and higher education institutions with the standards and the quality indicators.

The ***ARACIS Advisory Commission*** is composed of important persons of the academia; its mission is to check the evaluation procedures and support the decisions of the Agency (Annex 3 - Advisory Commission).

The Ethics Commission of ARACIS ensures compliance with the Code of ethics and rules of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS in assuring and evaluating the quality of higher education in Romania. The activities of this Commission are presented at paragraph 1.1.8.

The Disciplinary Commission of ARACIS has the competence to analyse the actions of employees notified as potential disciplinary offences and propose the required measures.

The Disciplinary Commission is a standing commission, according to Council Decision no. 147/19.12.2019, and is composed of three members (out of which two members of the ARACIS Council and one member of the technical structure of ARACIS) and assisted by one non-voting secretary of the technical structure of ARACIS. The members and the secretary of the Commission are on a four-year mandate.

Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions. The ARACIS Council decided that 13 Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions should be operational. These commissions are subordinated to the ARACIS Council. The commissions operate based on the Regulations concerning the activities of the permanent speciality experts' commissions, approved by the ARACIS Council, and are assisted by a body of ARACIS expert evaluators listed in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators (RNE). This body is composed of domestic and foreign university professors and associate professors with recognised professional activities and moral integrity, competence and experience in education quality assurance nationally and internationally. In order to become RNE-listed evaluators, the candidates undergo a transparent selection process regulated through a public procedure approved by the Council, available at: https://www.aracis.ro/registrul-national-al-evaluatorilor/.

Based on the Decision of the Council, the selection of new professors on the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions of ARACIS was conducted in December 2022, and new members were selected on the following commissions:

C1 - Exact sciences and natural sciences;
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences;
C10 - Engineering Sciences I;
C11 - Engineering Sciences II;
C13 – Distance and part-time learning.

Upon the expiry of the 4-year mandates of some of the members of the Permanent (speciality) Experts' Commissions of ARACIS, contests were conducted in January and October 2022, based on the Council's Decision, to select members on the vacant positions

in these commissions. New members were selected in the following commissions as a result of these contests:

C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences;
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology;
C3 - Legal Sciences;
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology;
C6 - Economic Sciences (I);
C7 - Economic Sciences (II);
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Town Planning, Physical Education and Sport;
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine;
C10 - Engineering Sciences I;
C11 - Engineering Sciences II;
C12 - Medical Sciences;
C13 – Distance and part-time learning.

Pursuant to the provisions of H/107/1/25.11.2021, according to which the Permanent (speciality) Experts' Commissions shall include employers' representatives, a contest was held in December 2022 to select employers' representatives on the available positions in the Permanent Experts' Commissions.

Furthermore, a contest was held in September-November 2022 to select the students members on all Permanent Speciality Commissions of ARACIS.

The ***Technical Structure of ARACIS*** is an executive structure with 93 staff positions at the beginning of 2022, out of which 52 staffed and 35 vacant.

4 contests were organised during 2022 for the vacant management and executive positions; the resulting situation is as follows:

Table 1. Filling up of the vacant management and executive positions in 2022

Type of employment	Number of people
Employees on management positions	1
New employees	6

Regarding participation in training courses/sessions for the development of skills/competences of the institution's employees, the situation is as follows:

Table 2. Participation in staff training courses/sessions in 2022

No.	Direction/Service/ Office/compartment	Training course/session title	No. of participants from the structure
1.	Quality Assurance Direction	Training of own staff on external quality evaluation matters	17
3.	BJAIC	Professional improvement classes - Legal administrative matters	2
4.	DOIRUAP	Web programming	1
		Professional improvement classes on public procurement	3
		Document archiving and management	1

No.	Direction/Service/ Office/compartment	Training course/session title	No. of participants from the structure
		Specialised training programme for management positions in the public sector	1
5.	Personnel of the Technical Structure of ARACIS	Workshop "General data protection regulation and its implications (December 2022)	9
		Risk management in managerial internal control	16
		The new managerial control system - SCIM	10

Source: ARACIS systematisation

1.1.5 Financial activity

The ARACIS budget includes revenues generated from internal sources, namely fees for the external evaluation activities for provisional authorising to operate / accreditation and/or periodical evaluation of study programmes, Master's study domains and/or institutional evaluations, based on service contracts concluded with higher education institutions, and financial revenues such as interests and external non-reimbursable funds (ENRF).

The ARACIS Council approved an income and expenditure budget of Lei 22,895,624 for both incomes and expenditure (Figure 1), out of which Lei 1,980,000 incomes and Lei 63,000 for expenses under projects funded from ENRF.

As of 31 December 2022, the revenues collected by ARACIS were Lei 14,002,868, out of which Lei 126,897 from ENRF, while actual payments amounted to Lei 18,999,538, out of which Lei 0 from projects funded from ENRF.

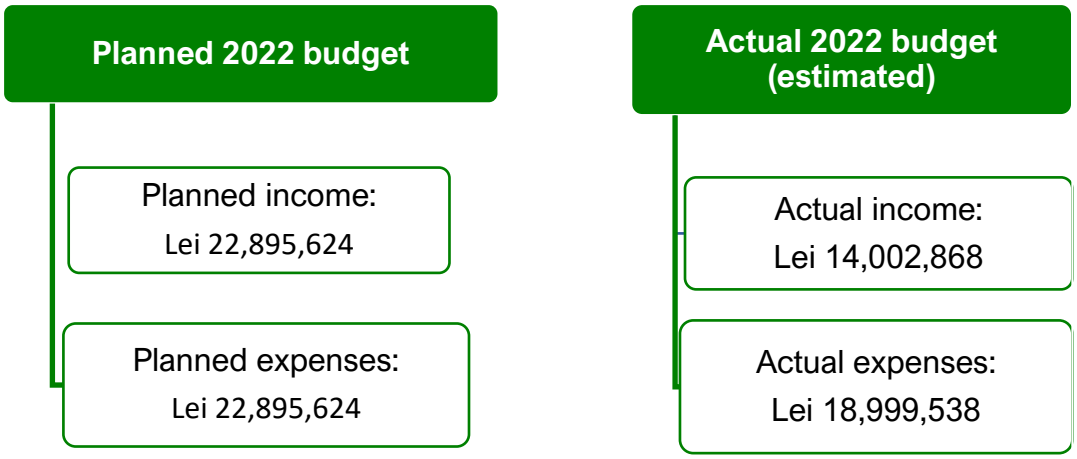


Figure 5. ARACIS income and expenditure budget for year 2022

These data were established in compliance with the applicable legal provisions in Romania.

As the data presented above indicate, there is a deficit on revenues of 8,892,756 Lei, out of which a deficit on collected revenues, amounting to 7,039,653 Lei for the core activity, and a deficit amounting to 1,853,103 Lei for the activity financed from ENRF and a deficit amounting to 3,896,086 Lei for expenses, out of which a deficit amounting to 3,833,086 Lei for the core

activity, and a deficit amounting to 63,000 Lei for the activity financed from ENRF. The differences in the realisation of the revenues pertaining to the core activity mainly originate from evaluation processes not being completed by the end of 2022. The unrealised difference of 3,833,086 Lei in expenses under the core activity is justified by the measures taken in carrying out the evaluation process, in particular the savings achieved in expenses with the transport and accommodation of expert evaluators due to the fact that some activities were carried out online in the context of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, as it was not possible to carry out all the evaluation activities in universities.

1.1.6 Procurement of IT equipment and services

Tender books and/or technical specifications were drafted in 2022 for the procurement of various IT products or services. Thus, the following purchases were made:

Table 3. List of IT equipment and services purchased in 2022

No.	Equipment/Services	No.
1.	Video conference system licenses Cisco Webex	20 subscriptions
2.	Zoom Business license subscriptions	10 pcs
3.	Office licenses	35 pcs
4.	Antivirus licenses	60 pcs
5.	Adobe Acrobat Standard 2020 licenses	6 pcs
6.	Grammarly Business licenses	1 pcs
7.	Software for online designing-editing-publishing	1 pcs
8.	Laptop + Office licenses	36 pcs
9.	Colour multifunctional printer	1 pcs
10.	Integrated video conference and voting system for hybrid activities	1 pcs
11.	Website updating services	1 pcs
12.	Technical services - accounting programme maintenance	1 pack
13.	Computer system maintenance services	1 pack
14.	Maintenance services for copying machines	1 pack
15.	Annual maintenance of IP addresses	1 pack

1.1.7 Legal activities

In 2022, as a result of the evaluation missions conducted and of the enforcement of all legal procedures for decision making and granting of marks, including appeal procedures, ARACIS had to appear in court in some cases following the appeals of some of the evaluated entities, in order to protect the decisions it had passed.

Thus, ARACIS acted as the defendant in three court cases. The defence pleas were formulated for all cases, de jure and de facto, by drafting denials of claims and enclosing supporting documents. Up to now, two of the cases on the docket of the courts are pending, and one case was lost.

The evaluation activities conducted in 2022 required a large number of expert evaluators to be involved; therefore, 770 quality evaluation contracts were concluded with Romanian expert evaluators, and 35 quality evaluation contracts were concluded with international expert evaluators.

22 Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and 133 ARACIS Council Decisions were drafted for year 2022, pertaining to various circumstances and cases. All the

Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and all Council Decisions have undergone the internal transparency, communication, numbering and archiving procedures.

Furthermore, all templates of service contracts that ARACIS uses in its evaluation activity and signs with the higher education institutions, as well as the template contracts for quality evaluation, concluded by ARACIS with domestic and international expert evaluators have been drafted and updated.

1.1.8 Internal quality assurance

The ARACIS Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office, through the internal quality assurance component, coordinates and provides the required logistic support for the activities related to establishing, documenting, implementing, maintaining, and continuously improving the efficacy of the internal quality assurance system of ARACIS, and collaborates with all the Agency's internal structures for this purpose.

By applying the internal quality assurance system, the ARACIS management commits to:

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

The maintenance and continuous improvement of the Internal quality assurance system complies with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), integrated with the Managerial Internal Control Standards (SCIM).

To this purpose, the Policy declaration on internal quality assurance at ARACIS was developed and approved in 2022, and the document published on the Agency's website.

For the main processes, records were kept in 2022 for all documented information/records; thus, the following documents were approved and published on the website at the Agency's level: one set of regulations; one set of guidelines; one standard, and eight revised standards of the Speciality Commissions.

To ensure a homogeneous, coherent system for documenting procedures (for the support processes) at the level of the Agency, the ARACIS management maintained and supported the integration of the managerial internal control system (SCIM).

The process of controlling system and operational procedures is integrated in the activity of the technical secretariat of the Monitoring Commission, which is ensured by the BJAIC personnel.

The responsibilities of the Technical Secretariat of the Monitoring Commission are established pursuant to the Order of the General Secretariat of the Government no. 600/2018 on approving the Code of managerial internal control of public entities, pursuant to the decision of the ARACIS president on setting up the Monitoring Commission for the implementation and development of the SCIM, and to the Organisational and Operational Regulations of the Monitoring Commission.

The activities carried out in 2022 for the purpose of developing the managerial internal control system (SCIM) were as follows:

- Recording, centralisation and processing of the data submitted by the internal structures of ARACIS;
- Organising and preparing meetings of the Monitoring Commission;
- Preparing the documents to support, organise, and draft the minutes of the Monitoring Commission's meetings and the decisions of the Monitoring Commission;
- Control of the system procedures (PS) and operational procedures (PO), by assigning codes to the procedures;
- Analysing the documented procedures for compliance with the minimal structure envisaged in the template presented in OSGG no. 600/2018, supplemented with the requirements contained in our own system procedure;
- Centralisation of the self-evaluation questionnaires evaluating the progress in the implementation of the managerial internal control standards, filled in by the ARACIS structure for the purpose of drafting the Synthetic report on the self-evaluation reports and the Summary on the progress of implementation and the development of the managerial internal control system;
- Drafting of the Report on the managerial internal control system.

Six operational procedures (PO) and one system procedure (PS) were revised and new editions for ten operational procedures and one system procedure regarding the internal activities conducted at the Agency were developed in 2022 in the Agency.

In 2022, the members of the Monitoring Commission and the risk officers in the internal structures of ARACIS attended training on the managerial internal control system.

The external feedback received from representatives of higher education institutions and other stakeholders on the external evaluation process and the activity of ARACIS teams of evaluators is one of the main components of the internal quality assurance system. Thus, using the ARACIS activity evaluation questionnaires filled in by the institutions evaluated in 2022, the BJAIC personnel drafts a report.

Similar to the previous years, year 2022 was a year of progress in revising and implementing internal quality assurance procedures for the Agency's activities. However, the implementation of the managerial internal control system is a continuous, long-lasting process and requires comprehensive management instruments to be developed.

1.1.9 Professional and administrative activities

All ARACIS activities are carried out in compliance with the provisions of the Code of ethics and rules of professional conduct (hereinafter the "Code of Ethics"). The Ethics Commission of ARACIS operationally ensures compliance with the provisions of the Code of Ethics.

Through the provisions of its Code of Ethics, ARACIS aligns to the principles and provisions of the Expert Evaluators' Code of Conduct of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The Code of Ethics is periodically improved; the edition in force is the 3rd edition, revised and supplemented, approved in the ARACIS Council Meeting of September 28, 2017. The Code of Ethics applies to all employees and external collaborators involved in ARACIS's activities.

The Ethics Commission of ARACIS has five members: a president, member of the Council, and four members, three of which are members of the Council – a professor, a student, and the representative of the higher education union, and the fourth one is appointed by the ARACIS Council among the permanent staff of the Agency. The Ethics Commission operates on a four-year mandate. The membership of the Ethics Commission, approved by the ARACIS Council on 25.01.2018, was modified after the change of representatives of the students' federations on the ARACIS Council's meeting of 28.10.2022. The Secretariat of the Ethics Commission is composed of two members appointed by the ARACIS President among the permanent staff of ARACIS. The membership of the Secretariat of the Ethics Commission was changed by the ARACIS Council Decision no. 12 of 02.08.2021.

The Ethics Commission is assisted by a legal adviser who approves its resolutions.

External evaluation activities involve members of the Council, external expert evaluators from the categories listed in the RNE, and the Agency's own staff - speciality inspectors and/or experts involved in professional activities that are directly linked to the evaluation process. The ARACIS Advisory Commission plays a key role in monitoring compliance with the procedures and ethical norms during the institutional evaluation procedures.

As ARACIS assigns special importance to the compliance with evaluation procedures and ethical norms, the number of registered violations was very small all along the operation of the Agency, and such violations were merely isolated cases.

1.1.10 Activity of the Public Internal Audit Compartment

ARACIS had the obligation to issue and submit its annual activity report on the public internal audit function to the Central Harmonisation Unit for Public Internal Audit (UCAAPI) and the Romanian Court of Accounts.

This annual activity report presents the progress in organising and operating the public internal audit structure as of 31 December 2022, and the public internal audit activity performed by the public internal audit structure at ARACIS during 2022.

The public internal audit function at ARACIS is established through an internal structure of the Agency, namely the Public Internal Audit Compartment.

According to the organisational chart of ARACIS, the Public Internal Audit Compartment is staffed with two public internal auditor positions. Currently, the Public Internal Audit Compartment operates with one public internal auditor position, while the other position is vacant.

In terms of its operation, the Public Internal Audit Compartment is directly subordinated to the ARACIS President, and carries out its function independently from the Agency's activities.

In 2022, the public internal auditor of the Public Internal Audit Compartment was not involved in performing any auditable activities. For every public internal audit mission in 2022, the public internal auditor filled in a "Declaration of independence" showing that there are no personal incompatibility situations.

The Public Internal Audit Compartment issued specific methodological norms on carrying out public internal audit activities, in line with the provisions of point 1.4.1 of Annex no. 1 to Government Decision no. 1086/2013 approving the General norms for carrying out public internal audit activities. The specific methodological norms regarding the public internal audit activity were approved by the ARACIS President and endorsed by UCAAPI according to the Qualified Endorsement no. 40/13.05.2014.

In line with the Action plan for implementing recommendations, registered at no. 4986 on 26.07.2019, drafted following UCAAPI's Evaluation report no. 370.944/06.09.2016, which includes recommendation no. 2 on obtaining the unqualified endorsement of UCAAPI, the specific public internal audit norms were updated and submitted for endorsement in letters no. 7315/30.12.2021 and no. 994/21.02.2022; however, the drafts were returned with no endorsement, and the main cause for not granting an endorsement was as follows: "to provide for the necessary measures to ensure performance of the management responsibilities specific to the public internal audit structure, including the supervisory activity".

The Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity (PAIC), registered at no. 6.635/22.11.2021, was issued at the level of the Public Internal Audit Compartment. The Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity includes: the programme drafting methodology; the action plan, and the monitoring report.

The Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity (PAIC) is updated regularly; the last update of the document was registered at no. 6.671/19.12.2022. Furthermore, the Action plan for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity was drafted in 2022 and registered at no. 6.636/22.11.2021. The action plan is the instrument that operationalises the Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity, and its structure includes objectives, actions, performance indicators, deadlines, entities in charge, and comments.

The 2022 Report on the public internal audit activity quality monitoring was drafted and registered at no. 6.673/19.12.2022. The Report on the monitoring of the Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity presents the results of the evaluation of the progress on the achievement of the objectives established in the action plan.

The Public Internal Audit Compartment was not evaluated by the Romanian Court of Accounts, UCAAPI or other entities during the reporting year (2022).

The public internal audit activity was planned by the Public Internal Audit Compartment of ARACIS as follows:

- the multi-annual 3-year planning includes the missions for auditing the activities carried out by the public entity, which activities are audited at least once in 3 years, and the advisory missions;
- the annual planning includes the missions to be carried out throughout one year, based on the results of the risk evaluation and the available audit resources.

The public internal audit missions included in the plan were selected according to the provisions of point 2.4.1.3. of Annex no. 1 to Government Decision no. 1086/2013 on approving the General norms for carrying out public internal audit.

The multi-annual public internal audit plan was drafted for a 3-year period, namely 2022-2024; the document was registered at no. 6.628/21.11.2021 and approved by the ARACIS President.

The annual public internal audit plan was drafted by 30 November 2021; the document was registered at no. 6.629/21.11.2021 and approved by the ARACIS President by 20 December 2021, in line with the provisions of Government Decision no. 1086/2013 on approving the General norms for carrying out public internal audit.

The public internal audit missions included in the Multi-annual 2022-2024 public internal audit plan and the 2022 Public internal audit plan were substantiated by the substantiation report registered at no. 6.630/21.11.2021, approved by the ARACIS President, which includes a summary of the results of the relevant risk analysis for each public internal audit mission, the flag criteria and other specific elements considered in selecting the audit mission.

The 2022-2024 Multi-annual public internal audit plan, registered at no. 6.628/21.11.2021, and the 2022 Annual public internal audit plan, registered at no. 6.629/21.11.2021 were modified through the Report on modifying the 2022-2024 Multi-annual public internal audit plan and the 2022 Public internal audit plan, registered at no. 862/22.02.2022 and approved by the ARACIS President.

The public internal audit plans were modified upon the request of the new ARACIS President appointed on 13.01.2022 to replace the regularity/compliance audit mission included at no. 1 under specific functions in the 2022 Annual public internal audit plan, titled “Evaluation of the organisation and operation of the Quality Assurance Direction”, with the regularity/compliance audit mission under specific functions titled “Evaluation of the organisation and performance of public procurements”. The replaced mission was scheduled for auditing in year 2024 in the 2022-2024 Multi-annual public internal audit plan.

The 2022 Public internal audit plan, registered at no. 861/22.02.2022, updated and approved by the ARACIS President, includes 5 public internal audit missions, as follows:

❑ Four regularity/compliance assurance missions, namely:

1. Regularity/compliance assurance mission regarding “Evaluation of the organisation and performance of public procurements”, regarding the field of public procurement; duration of auditing activities: 21/03/2022 – 11/05/2022.
2. Regularity/compliance assurance mission regarding “Evaluation of the organisation and operation of the Administrative Office”, regarding the field of entity-specific functions; duration of auditing activities: 12/05/2022 – 01/07/2022.

3. Regularity/compliance assurance mission regarding "Payment of salaries, recording of travel expenses in the accounting system", regarding the financial-accounting field; duration of auditing activities: 12/07/2022 – 02/09/2022.
4. Regularity/compliance assurance mission regarding the "Organisation and operation of the legal activity", regarding the legal field; duration of auditing activities: 03/10/2022 – 22/11/2022.

- One formalised advisory mission on the topic of "Management and control systems and the risks associated with such systems", regarding the SCIM field; duration of auditing activities: 31.01.2022 - 18.03.2022.

All the 5 public internal audit missions included in the 2022 Public internal audit plan have been carried out.

No irregularities were found during the public internal audit missions carried out in 2022, and there have been no formulated recommendations that were not taken up by the ARACIS President. 14 recommendations were followed up, with the following results:

- 11 recommendations implemented within the established time limit;
- 3 recommendations not implemented, for which the time limit established for implementation has not been exceeded.

At the level of the Public Internal Audit Compartment, the attendance rate of the public internal auditor in professional training activities in 2022 was 100%. The average number of professional training days for the public internal auditor, according to Law no. 672/2002 on the public internal audit, as further amended and supplemented, is 15 days, which included:

- 5 days of training courses;
- 10 days of individual study.

Furthermore, in line with the Action plan for the implementation of recommendations, registered at no. 4986 on 26.07.2019, drafted as a result of Evaluation report no. 370.944/06.09.2016 issued by UCAAPI, 3 fully implemented recommendations were achieved and sent to UCAAPI.

1.2 Summary of activities

1.2.1 Management of current activities

During 2022, the BEx of the ARACIS Council sat in meetings that were usually organised weekly, and in extraordinary meetings organised whenever necessary. On such occasions, the BEx reviewed the requests and documents received by it for review and decision, and formulated resolutions, which were forwarded directly to the applicants or submitted to the ARACIS Council for review and approval.

In all these cases, irrespective of the form of the requests (letters, e-mail, phone requests, etc.), the responses were formulated within the legal deadline and within the limits of ARACIS's competence.

4 appeals were filed in the reference period and resolved, out of which:

- one regarding a bachelor's study programme;
- two regarding master's study domains;
- one regarding a doctoral study domain.

1.2.2 Collaboration with higher education institutions and other stakeholders

The Executive Board of the ARACIS Council organised hearings for the interested natural entities or the representatives of the interested institutions, such as: rectors of higher education institutions; presidents of associations or foundations; university professors; journalists; students, etc., and provided written answers to the requests of the higher education institutions in Romania and of other stakeholders.

The entire activity carried out by ARACIS in 2022 was based on expanding the collaboration with stakeholders with a view to assuring quality in the higher education system in Romania. ARACIS was an active partner of Romanian universities, and through its activities and projects supported their efforts towards assuring and improving quality, as well as the efforts of the MoE towards drafting and/or revising some national regulations in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

1.2.3 Students' involvement

Students were permanently involved and supported by the ARACIS Council, and they participated in the external quality evaluation visits.

Students are full members both in the ARACIS Council and in the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions; they attend the meetings of the BEx of the ARACIS Council, and participate in all evaluations (institutional evaluations; evaluations of Master domains; evaluations of higher education programmes) carried out by the Agency.

The National Register of Evaluators - Students (RNE-S) was updated in 2022 based on the information received from students' federations regarding continuation of the student status. The composition of the RNE-S, posted on the webpage of ARACIS, (http://www.aracis.ro/registrul-national-al-evaluatorilor) is periodically updated and supplemented.

ARACIS continued to engage students in all external evaluation processes, in line with the regulations in force in Romania and the provisions of ESG 2015. The process of selecting new student representatives in the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions in 2021 was carried out in compliance with the provisions of the Procedure for selecting and appointing students, members of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions.

1.2.4 Evaluation of the Agency's activity by beneficiaries and other stakeholders

The Agency pays great attention to how it carries out its activities in order to enable continuous improvement of such activities. To this purpose, after introducing and disseminating a Feedback questionnaire in 2017 to obtain information about how the evaluated institution perceives the Agency's activity, ARACIS continued to apply the

Questionnaire in 2022[1]. This approach is a continuation of the activities presented in the Barometer of quality in the higher education system, published by ARACIS in 2015, and intends to continuously identify measures to improve the external quality assurance procedures.

In June 2022 ARACIS conducted public procurement to purchase sociological research services for two studies:

A. The Report on the internal quality evaluation of ARACIS
B. The Barometer of Higher Education Quality in Romania

The first two works are based on sociological research conducted through surveys and qualitative interviews by the contracted company, "AB European Research Group" among four target groups: students, graduates, professors, and employers. The number of respondents was over 93,000. The volume of the validated sample per each target group is as follows:

No.	Target group	No. of respondents		No. of interviews
		A. Report on the internal quality evaluation of ARACIS	B. Barometer of Higher Education Quality in Romania	
1	Students	1,709	77,275*	30
2	Graduates	1,535	1,535	30
3	Professors	1,452	1,452	41
4	Employers	1,524	1,524	20
TOTAL		**6,220**	**81,786**	**121**

*Note: * The database was supplemented with the questionnaires obtained under the QAFIN project.*

The two works will be published and disseminated in 2023.

1.2.5 Studies and thematic analyses produced at the Research Office

According to the 2022 Operational Programme, the members of the Research Office, together with a team of experts from the Agency, worked on research studies and thematic analyses (AT), including:

1. *Statistical analysis of the human potential involved in the external evaluation of doctoral studies*
2. *Analysis of the indicators, qualifications and recommendations resulted from the external evaluation of IOSUD, 2021*
3. *Analysis of the activity and quality of doctoral studies at the level of IOSUDs, 2021*
4. *Analysis of the level of internationalisation of the activity of doctoral studies at the level of IOSUDs - Criterion C.3*
5. *Analysis of the indicators and qualifications resulted from the external evaluation of doctoral domains*

[1] *Questionnaire - Opinion of the representatives of evaluated higher education institutions and of other stakeholders regarding the external evaluation process and the activity of the ARACIS evaluation panels*

6. *Analysis of the results of the external evaluation of the Mechanical Engineering doctoral domain*
7. *Analysis of the questionnaire" Opinion of the representatives of evaluated higher education institutions and of other stakeholders regarding the external evaluation process and the activity of the ARACIS evaluation panels" – year 2021*
8. *Analysis - Quality management in higher education institutions in Romania.*

Some of the thematic analyses were disseminated by the Agency's management in various domestic and international conferences and at the National Rectors' Meeting: ARACIS Presentation at the CNR 09 April 2022 Iași.

2 EXTERNAL EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND ARACIS EVALUATORS

Approval by the ministers in charge with higher education of the new Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education – ESG 2015 at the Ministers' Conference of Yerevan (Armenia, May 14-15, 2015) brought about the need to revise the Methodology for external evaluation of ARACIS, approved by GD no. 915/2017 published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 25/11.01.2018.

Revision of the Methodology in 2018 also aimed at shifting the focus of the evaluation processes from the entry indicators to a result-based evaluation, with greater accountability created at the level of internal higher education quality assurance structures. The methodology revised in 2018 implements the provisions of ESG 2015 in the approved criteria, standards and performance indicators, which will continue to be improved through greater involvement of stakeholders from various categories in quality assurance activities.

For ARACIS, improving the criteria, standards and performance indicators is a continuous concern and a continuous process. Thus, the QAFIN project, conducted with the support of the World Bank, in which ARACIS was a partner, and the implementation of which started in 2017 and was completed in 2021, provides additional support in improving the quality of internal and external quality assurance processes.

2.1 Evaluations conducted by ARACIS in 2022

The Agency's current portfolio of external higher education quality evaluation activities includes the following types of evaluation: Institutional evaluations; Bachelor study programmes evaluations; Evaluations of master programmes / study domains; Doctoral school and doctoral domain evaluations; Evaluations of teacher training programmes, and Evaluations of Romanian language programmes for foreign students (figure 7).

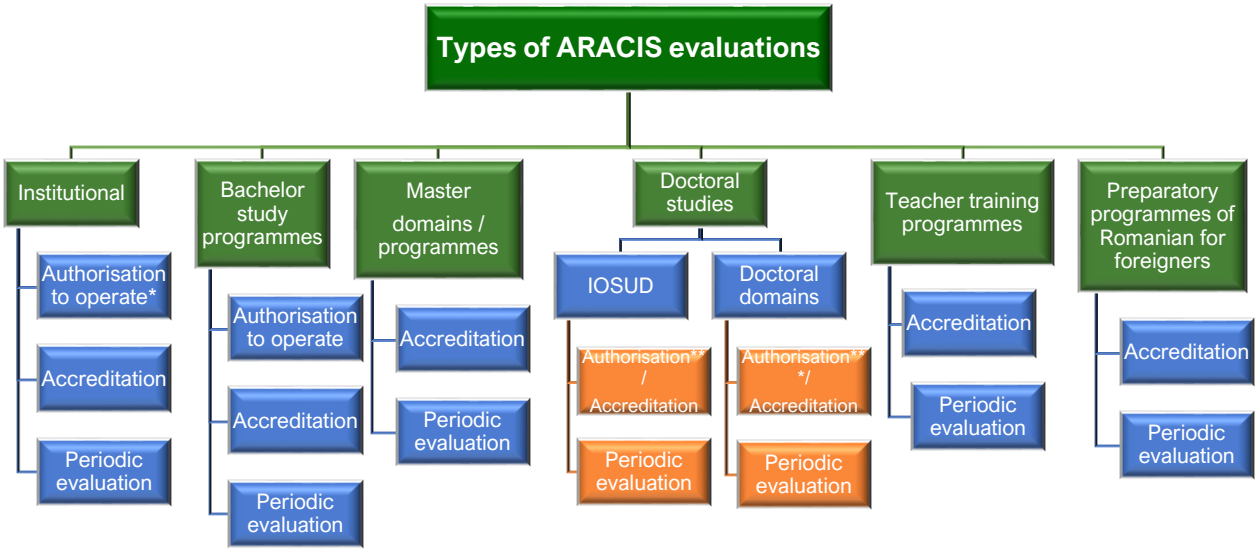


Figure 6. Types of evaluations in the ARACIS portfolio

Key:
** Granted by the Ministry of Education*
*** For recognition of IOSUD capacity*
**** When the doctoral study programmes promoted by the IOSUD are not organised in the same domains as the Master study domains*

In 2022, ARACIS had 507 applications from universities requesting external quality evaluation for bachelor and master programmes; 70 requests for evaluation for the classification of new master programmes under accredited master domains; 12 requests for evaluation of the teacher training programme for certification of skills for the teaching profession, and 8 requests for evaluation of the preparatory programme of Romanian language for foreigners.

23 higher education institutions approached the Agency with requests for the periodical external evaluation of 82 master study domains.

Furthermore, 14 requests for external evaluation of the academic quality and two requests for institutional accreditation were filed.

In 2022, 14 institution organising doctoral studies (IOSUD) filed 21 requests for external evaluation for the setting up of new doctoral studies domains. Furthermore, ARACIS had 26 requests for external quality evaluation of doctoral study domains (evaluation after one year) after receiving a conditional accreditation qualification (requests from 13 IOSUD).

In order to respond to these requests, the Accreditation Department of ARACIS operated according to its prerogatives laid down in the ROF, as follows:

- drafting of the internal reports of ARACIS, with support from the staff of the technical structure of ARACIS, for the validation of the results of the missions for the evaluation of programmes for provisional authorisation (AP), accreditation (A) or periodical evaluation (EP) (for continuation of the accreditation);
- organising and managing the database of education programme evaluations;
- management and updating of the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators.

Table 4 gives a status of the study programmes in universities in Romania evaluated by ARACIS in 2022. Most of the evaluation activities were for accredited study programmes, evaluated periodically to maintain their accreditation.

Table 4. Total external evaluations carried out by ARACIS in 2022, per types of evaluation

TYPE OF EVALUATION	No. of evaluations
Institutional evaluations (EI)	22
Bachelor study programmes	441
Master study programmes	84
Master study domains (DM)	149
Preparatory programmes of Romanian language for foreigners	5
Teacher training programmes for certification of skills for the teaching profession DPPD	14
Higher education institutions organising doctoral studies (IOSUD)	0
Doctoral study domains (DD)	16
Total evaluations	**731**

Source: Processed by ARACIS

The activities carried out by each Speciality Commission are summarised in Table 5. Most of the times, the Speciality Commissions had monthly meetings.

Table 5 Number of meetings and evaluated programmes, per Speciality Commissions and ARACIS Council meetings in 2022

Speciality Commission	No. of meetings	Bachelor programmes	Master domains	Master programmes (accreditation + classification)
ARACIS Council meetings	**12**	**-**	**-**	**-**
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	**8**	29	12	4
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	**9**	34	7	10
C3 - Legal Sciences	**7**	3	11	4
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	**10**	31	12	2
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	**9**	25	10	5
C6 - Economic Sciences I	**8**	25	16	6
C7 - Economic Sciences II	**10**	22	10	5
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	**10**	38	10	9
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	**7**	25	4	6
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	**11**	79	29	18
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	**10**	68	21	10

Speciality Commission	No. of meetings	Bachelor programmes	Master domains	Master programmes (accreditation + classification)
C12 - Medical Sciences	**10**	30	7	4
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	**6**	32	0	1
Total evaluated programmes	-	441	149	84

Source: Processed by ARACIS

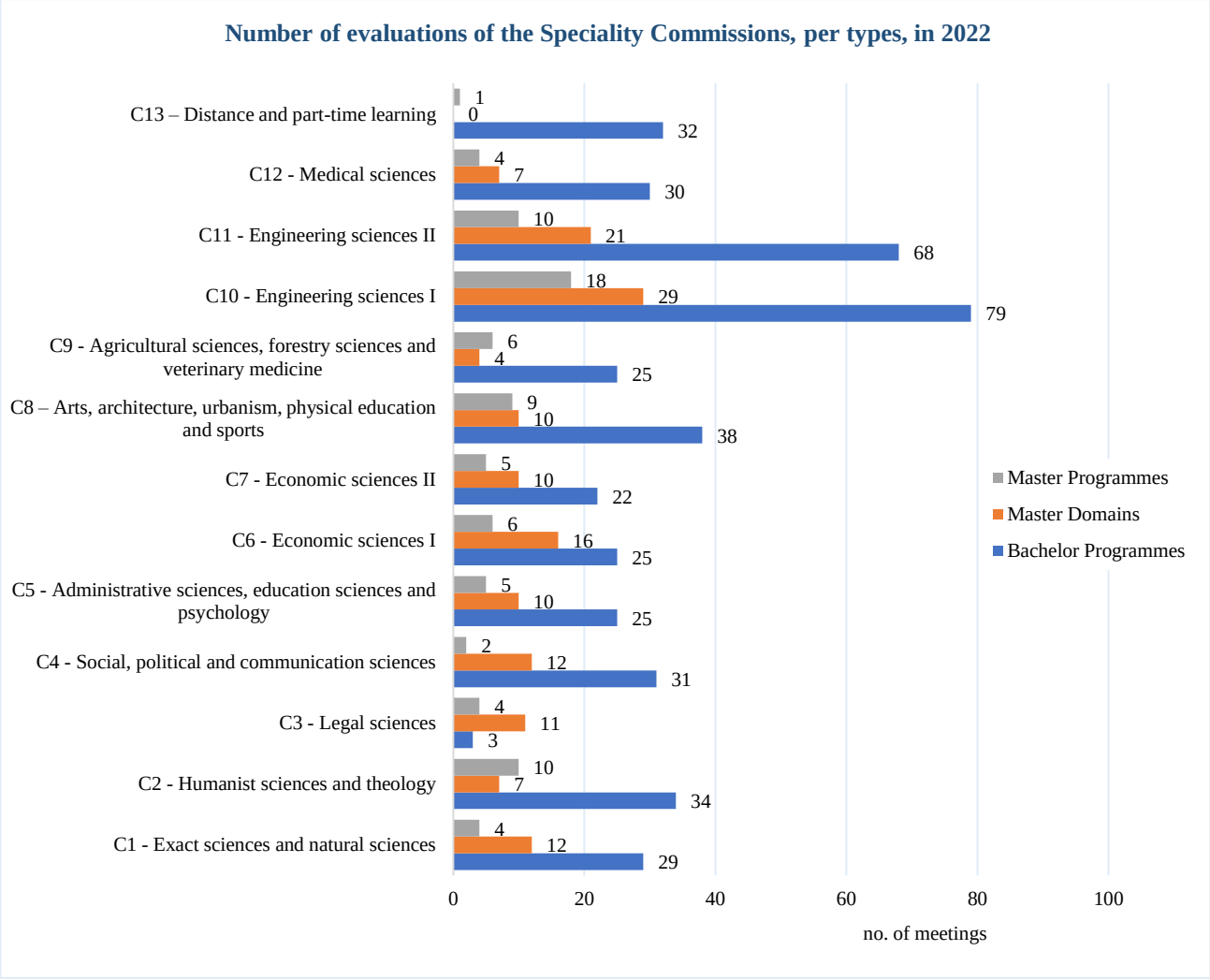


Figure 7. Number of evaluations of the Speciality Commissions, per types, in 2022

2.1.1 Institutional evaluations

In 2022, the figures related to the external evaluation of higher education institutions are as follows:

Table 6. Qualifications obtained in the institutional evaluations in 2022

	Qualifications obtained	

Indicator	High degree of confidence	Confidence	Limited degree of confidence	No confidence	Institutional accreditation	Institutional non-accreditation	Total institutional evaluations
No. of evaluations	16	3	2	1	-	-	22

In 2022, ARACIS provided the higher education institutions with the certificates certifying the qualifications awarded after the institutional evaluations performed by the Agency in 2021 – 2022.

2.1.2 Evaluation of Bachelor study programmes

A statistic report on the evaluations of Bachelor study programmes evaluated by ARACIS in 2022 is given below:

Table 7. Evaluations of Bachelor programmes by form of education in 2022

indicator	Form of education			Total evaluations
	Full time education (FTE)	Part-time education (PTE)	Distance education (DE)	
No. of programmes	409	10	22	441
Share %	92.7%	2.3%	5%	100%

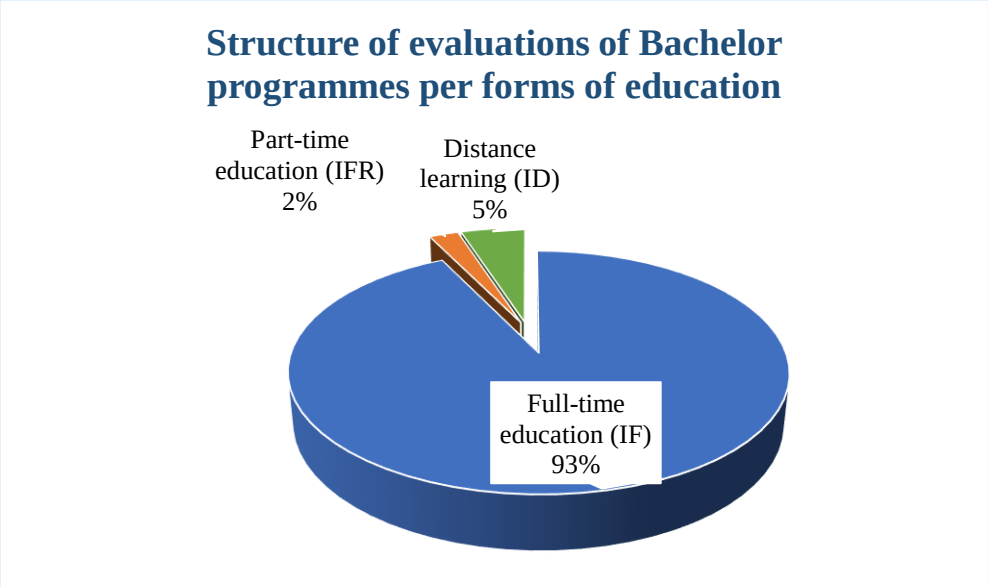


Figure 8. Structure of evaluations of Bachelor programmes per forms of education

Table 8. Distribution of Bachelor programme evaluations by type of evaluation in 2022

indicator	Type of evaluation			Total evaluations
	Provisional authorisation (AP)	Accreditation (A)	Periodic evaluation (EP)	
No. of programmes	51	51	339	441
Share %	11.56%	11.56%	76.88%	100%

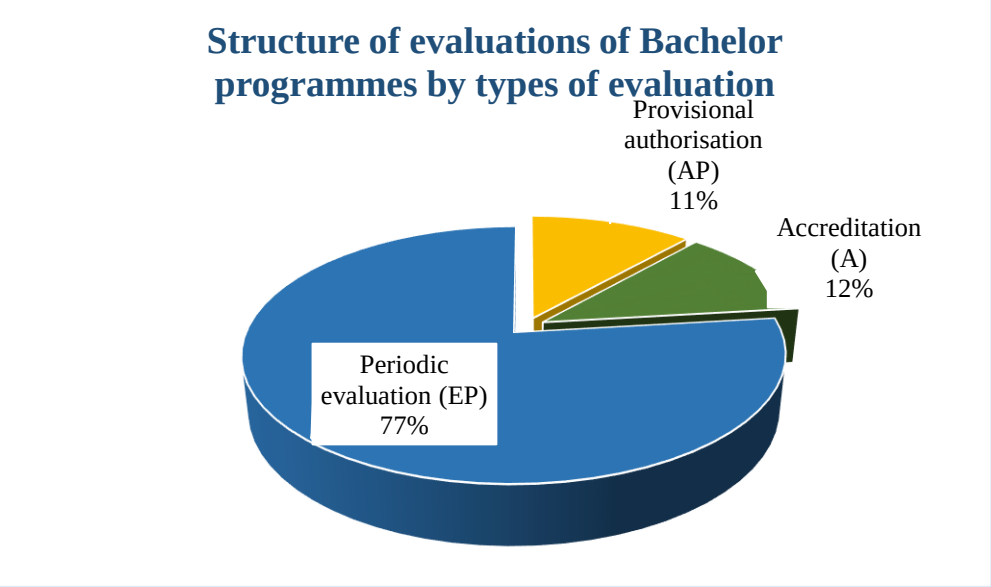


Figure 9. Structure of evaluations of Bachelor programmes by types of evaluation

Table 9. Approvals obtained in the evaluation of Bachelor programmes for Authorisation in 2022

Authorisation / Type of evaluation	Approvals obtained			Total
	Authorisation	Authorisation with monitoring	Non-authorisation	
No. of programmes	49	-	2	51
Share %	96.1%	0%	3.9%	100%

Table 10. Approvals obtained in the evaluation of Bachelor programmes for Accreditation in 2022

Accreditation / Type of evaluation	Approvals obtained			Total
	Accreditation	Accreditation with monitoring	Non-accreditation	
No. of programmes	47	3	1	51
Share %	92.1%	5.9%	2.0%	100%

Table 11. Approvals obtained in the periodic evaluation of Bachelor programmes during the periodic evaluation in 2022

Periodic evaluation/ Type of evaluation	Approvals obtained			Total
	Maintaining accreditation	Periodic evaluation with monitoring	Accreditation withdrawn	
No. of programmes	322	14	3	339
Share %	95.0%	4.1%	0.9%	100%

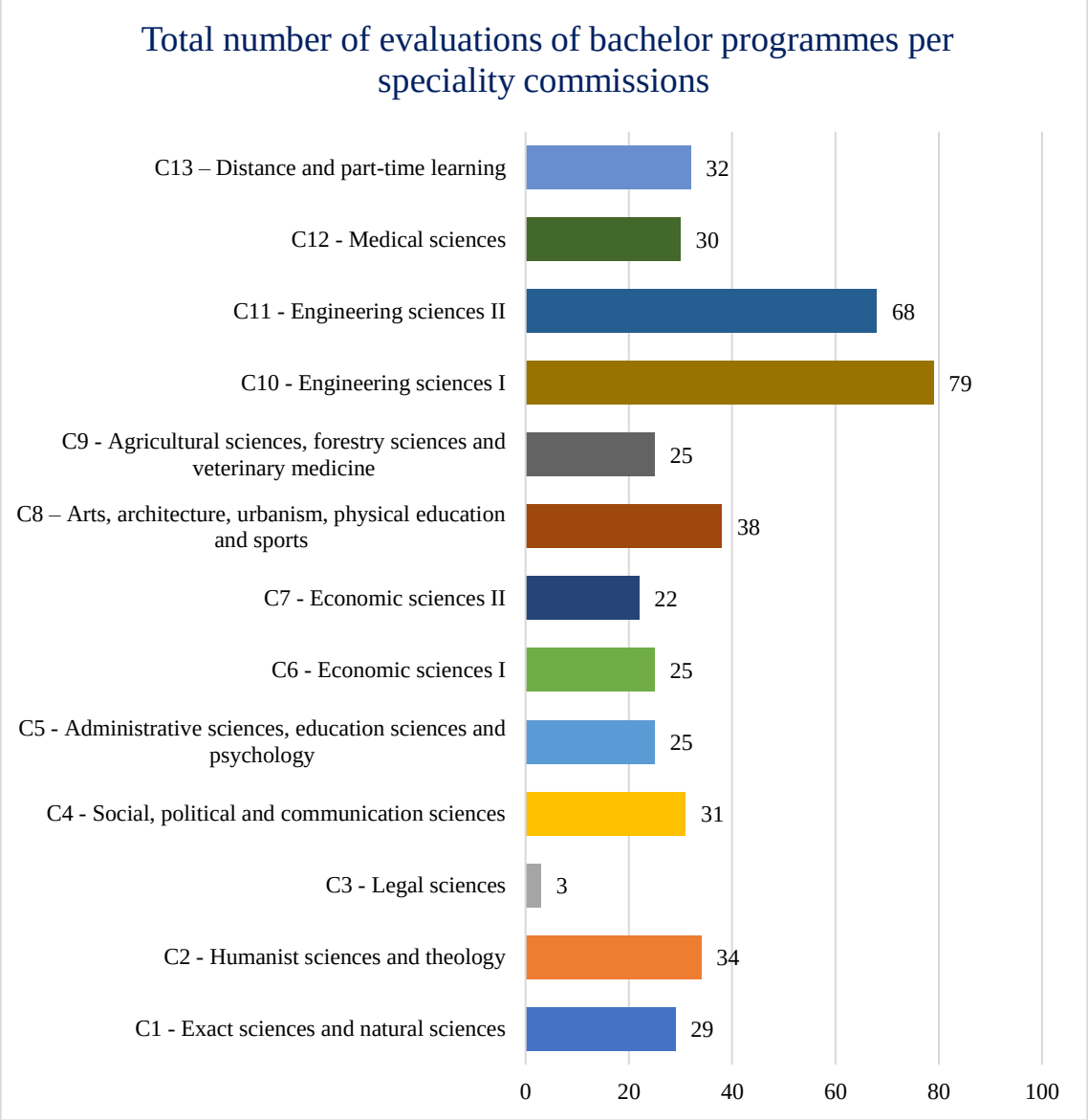


Figure 10. Total number of evaluations of Bachelor programmes, per Speciality Commissions

Table 12. Number of evaluations of Bachelor programmes, per Speciality Commissions

Commission	Bachelor programmes	Out of which:		
		Authori-sation	Accreditation	Periodic evaluation
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	29	5	4	20
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	34	1	1	32
C3 - Legal Sciences	3	0	0	3
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	31	3	6	22
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	25	2	2	21
C6 - Economic Sciences I	25	1	3	21
C7 - Economic Sciences II	22	1	3	18
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	38	3	8	27

Commission	Bachelor programmes	Out of which: Authorisation	Accreditation	Periodic evaluation
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	25	2	4	19
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	79	12	2	65
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	68	13	5	50
C12 - Medical Sciences	30	6	7	17
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	32	2	6	24
Total evaluations	441	51	51	339

Source: Processed by ARACIS, February 2022

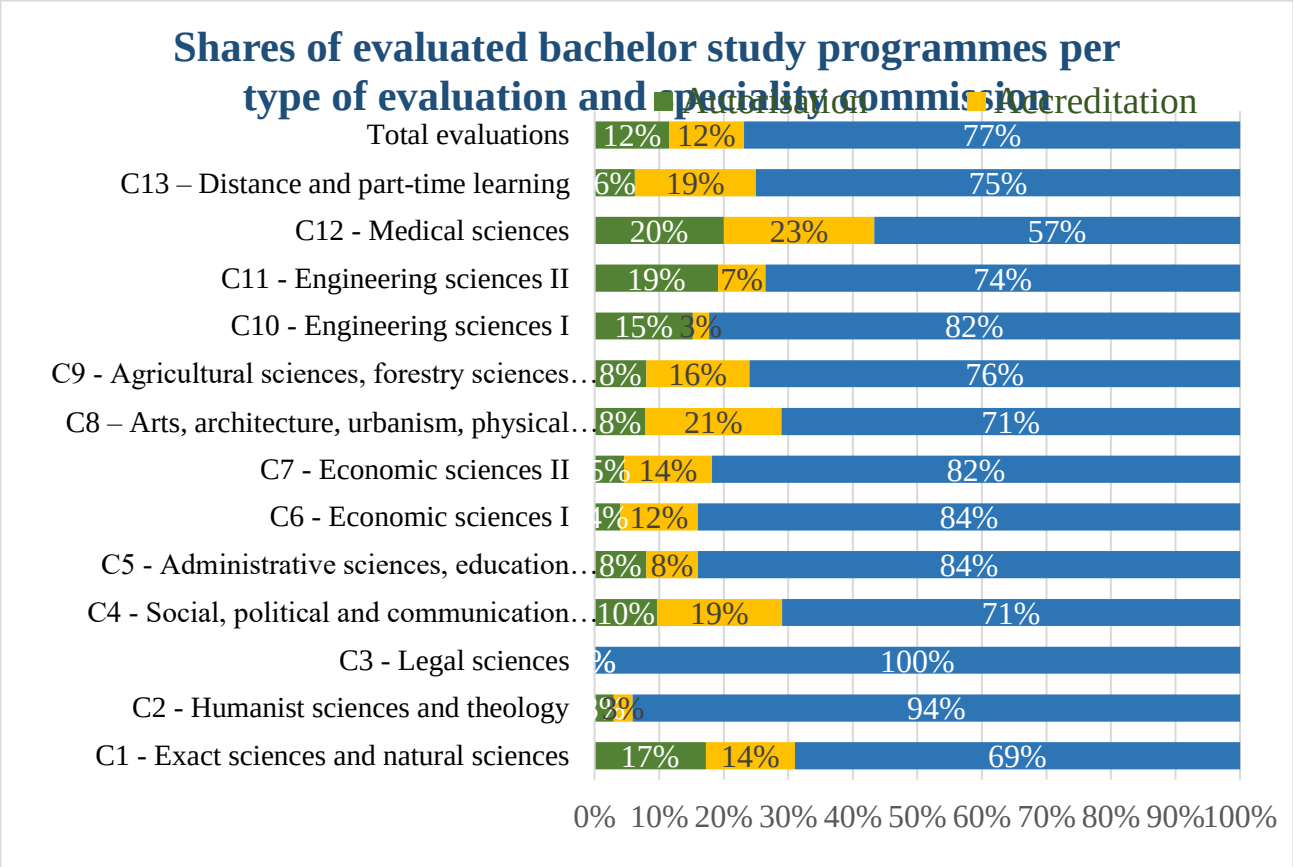


Figure 11. Structure of evaluated Bachelor programmes, per types of evaluations and Speciality Commissions

2.1.3 Evaluations of Master study programmes

A statistic report on the evaluations of Master domains and study programmes evaluated by ARACIS in 2022 is given below:

Table 13. Evaluations of Master domains, by qualifications obtained in 2022

Indicator	Master domains evaluated		Total
	Maintaining accreditation	Accreditation withdrawn	
No. of domains	143 + 4 monitoring	2	149

Table 14. Evaluations of Master programmes, by qualifications obtained, in 2022

Indicator	For accreditation		For classification		Total evaluations
	Accreditation	Non-accreditation	classification	non-classification	
No. of programmes	7	0	69	8	84
Total	7		77		

Table 15. Number of evaluations of Master domains and programmes, per Speciality Commissions

Commission	Master domains	Classification programmes
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	12	4
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	7	10
C3 - Legal Sciences	11	4
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	12	2
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	10	5
C6 - Economic Sciences I	16	6
C7 - Economic Sciences II	10	5
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	10	9
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	4	6
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	29	18
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	21	10
C12 - Medical Sciences	7	4
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	0	1
Total evaluations	149	84

Source: Processed by ARACIS

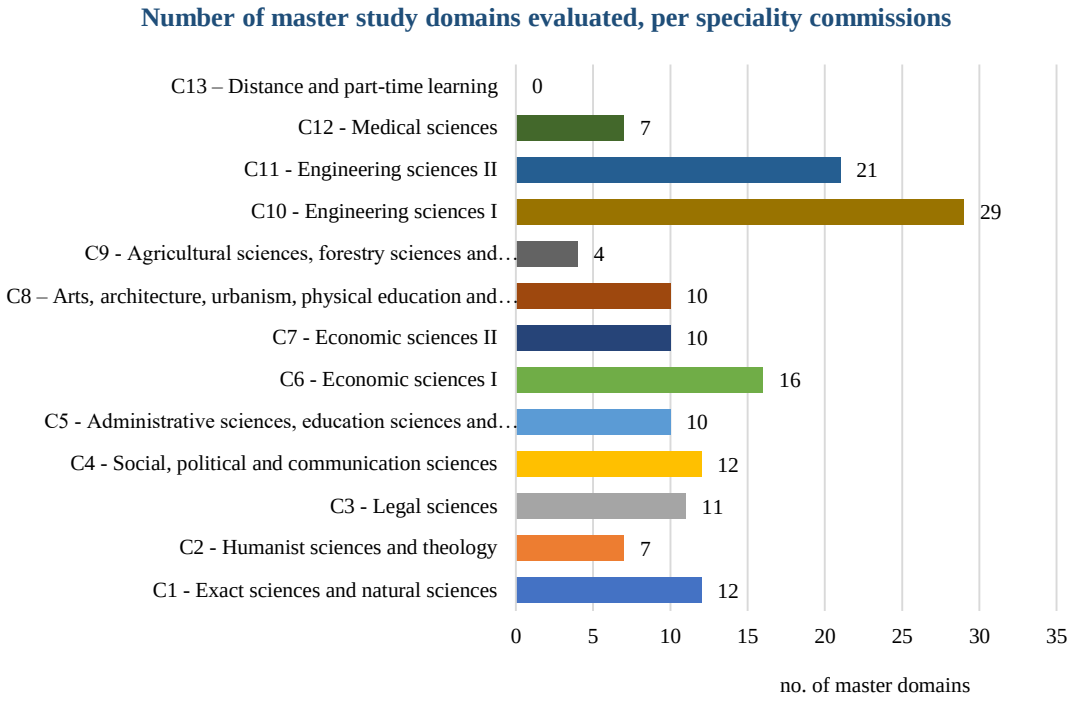


Figure 12. Number of Master domains evaluated, per Speciality Commissions

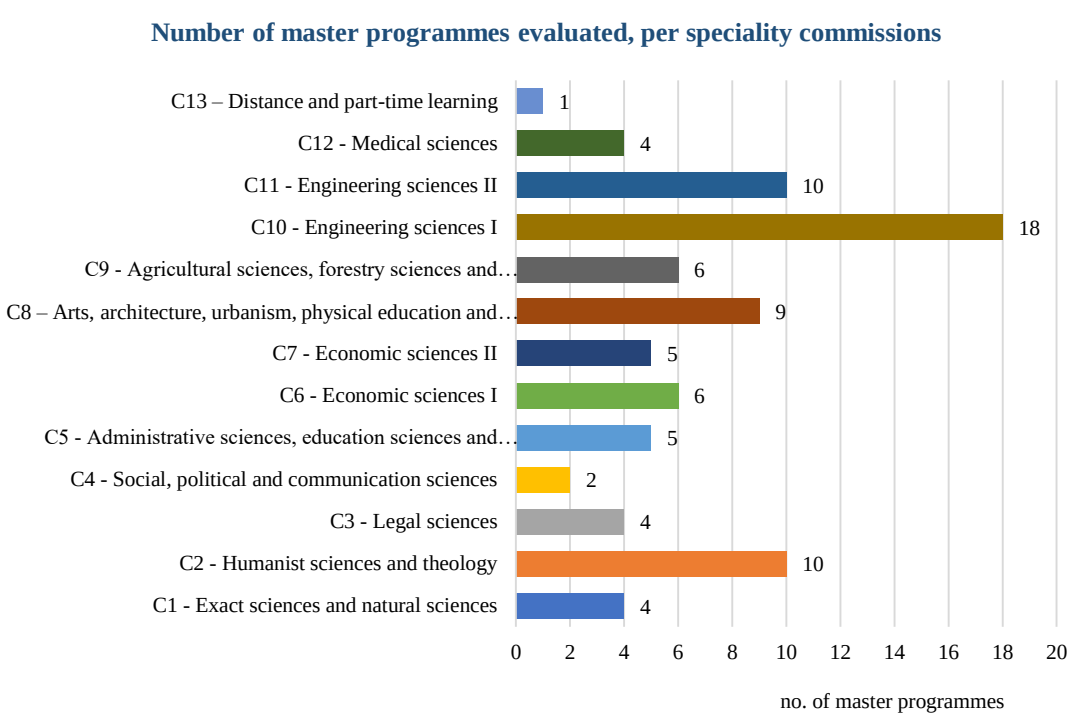


Figure 13. Number of Master programmes evaluated, per Speciality Commissions

2.1.4 Evaluations of doctoral study programmes

In 2022, ARACIS carried out the external evaluation of doctoral studies for 16 doctoral study domains (DD).

Table 16. General summary of the IOSUD and DD evaluation process in 2022

Indicators	No. of IOSUD/DD

IOSUD evaluated in 2022	0
DD evaluated in 2022	16

2.1.5 Evaluations of teacher training programmes

Table 17. Evaluations of teacher training programmes in 2022

Indicator	Type of evaluation		Total evaluations
	For accreditation (A)	Periodic evaluation for maintaining accreditation (EP)	
No. of programmes	1	13	14

2.1.6 Evaluations of Preparatory programmes of Romanian for foreigners

Table 18. Evaluations of Preparatory programmes of Romanian for foreigners, by type of evaluations, in 2022

Year	Type of evaluation		Total evaluations
	For accreditation (A)	Periodic evaluation for maintaining accreditation (EP)	
2022	0	5	5

2.2 The ARACIS National Register of Evaluators

Table 19. Number of evaluators on the RNE, per speciality commissions 2022

Commission	No. of RNE evaluators
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	91
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	68
C3 - Legal Sciences	31
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	41
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	47
C6 - Economic Sciences I	85
C7 - Economic Sciences II	89
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	55
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	73
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	89
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	201
C12 - Medical Sciences	59
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	26
C14. Commission of Institutional Evaluation for Managerial and Financial Activities	14
Total RNE - Professors	**969**
National Register of Student Expert Evaluators (RNE-S)	241
National Register of International Evaluators (RNE-I)	294
Register of Employers' Representatives (RNE-A)	105
Total RNE evaluators	**1,609**

Source: Processed by ARACIS

2.2.1 Updating of the National Register of Evaluators - Students

In 2022, ARACIS supported student federations in organising one training session for students to become ARACIS student evaluators. The student training session on external quality evaluation in higher education was conducted between 7 – 14 July 2022, and was attended by 77 students.
After this training session and the updating of the National Register of Student Evaluators (RNE-S) of ARACIS, at the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year, the situation of evaluator students listed in the RNE-S is given in the table below:

Table 22. Number of student evaluators in the RNE-S, per nationally recognised federations, in 2022

Students federation	Number of student evaluators
National Alliance of Students' Organisations in Romania (ANOSR)	126
National Union of Students in Romania (UNSR)	86
Romanian Students' Union (USR)	29
Total student evaluators on the RNE – S	**241**

3 COOPERATION

3.1 National cooperation

ARACIS cooperates continuously with higher education institutions to fulfil its responsibilities related to the external evaluation in order to ensure the academic quality of higher education providers, institutions organising doctoral studies, higher education study programmes, Master study domains and doctoral study domains, on the grounds of the standards and evaluation methodologies.
Thus, following the public consultation with stakeholders (students' federations, higher education institutions, university consortia, the National Rectors' Council, the Ministry of Education, the trade union of the higher education staff, the National Authority for Qualifications), the Quality standards for carrying out teaching, learning, research, practical and evaluation activities in full-time education by using specific electronic, IT and synchronous communication resources, and the Maximum share of activities in synchronous online format per bachelor, master and doctoral study domains were finalised and published on the webpage of the Agency.
In 2022, ARACIS continued to have consultations with the Ministry of Education; the National Council for Certification of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU); the Executive Unit for Funding in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI); the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC), other higher education institutions, and other stakeholders (persons / structures / organisations), with the purpose to ensure quality in the higher education system.

Furthermore, the representatives of ARACIS attended several events and working groups in the field of quality assurance in higher education, organised at national level by the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC), the Academic Ethics and University Management Council (CEMU), the National Rectors' Council (CNR), the Executive Unit for Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI) or universities, and delivered presentations on topics related to quality assurance in higher education.
Thus, on 24 January 2022, Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General, attended the January-March 2022 meetings of the Academic Ethics and University Management Council (CEMU).
Mr Professor Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu, former President of ARACIS (between 2014 – 2021), currently adviser to the President, and Mr Dr. Eng. Cristian Erbașu, member of the ARACIS Council – employers' representative attended the second edition of the "Together We Protect Romania" Excellence Gala organised by the MediaUno Press Group and the National Institute for Statistics under the patronage of the Romanian Academy. At the Gala, Professor Dr. Eng. Petrescu was awarded the Excellence Award for his activity in quality assurance in higher education, and Dr. Eng. Erbașu received an award for his activity in the field of constructions.
On 27 September, Mr President, Associate Professor Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu attended the round table on surveying students' satisfaction with their experience at the university, organised by the Executive Unit for Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI).

3.2 International cooperation

3.2.1 Activities within ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ARACIS is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2009, and it periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this status.

We specify that, in January 2022, ARACIS initiated action for the targeted external review process recently introduced by ENQA and EQAR. The result of the external review is the condition for ARACIS to remain an ENQA member and renew its registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The result of the previous ENQA evaluation of our Agency in 2017-2018 is available on our webpage in the International cooperation section.

The targeted review focuses on the challenges that the Agency is still facing in complying with the ESG (standards partially complied with in the previous external evaluation; the new external evaluation activities carried out by the Agency; substantial changes), and, at the same time, seeks to support agencies in their continuous efforts to improve their own activity.

Thus, the following activities have been conducted:

- ✓ Establishing of the Terms of Reference (including the schedule) for the external evaluation of ARACIS (November), agreed by ENQA and EQAR;
- ✓ Signing of the External evaluation contract by ARACIS and ENQA (November);
- ✓ Drafting and sending the Agency's Self-evaluation report to ENQA (December).

As part of the external evaluation process, ENQA's evaluation visit to ARACIS will be conducted in March 2023. According to the dates envisaged in the schedule, ENQA will draft the External evaluation report in April 2023, and the external evaluation will be completed in 2023.

In order to implement ENQA's policy regarding active involvement of agencies in the Association's activities, ARACIS representatives attended several events organised by the Association in 2022.

Thus, ARACIS representatives attended the main events/meetings organised by ENQA, namely:

- ✓ The second workshop under the 2021-2022 Leadership Programme, 2 – 4 March. The workshop was hosted online by the Quality and Qualifications Agency of Ireland (QQI).
- ✓ Meeting of the ENQA Executive Board, 27 April.
- ✓ General Assembly Meeting, 28 April. A number of documents were reviewed and approved at the meeting, including the Audit report, and new members, as well as agencies with renewed membership were admitted.
- ✓ Progress visits under the "Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG (SEQA-ESG)" project. Between 10 – 11 October, the progress visit was conducted at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) and the National Higher Education Accreditation Office (NAB) in Prague, and in 21 October, the progress visit was at the National Education and Research Quality Assurance Agency (ANACEC) in the Republic of Moldova.
- ✓ General Assembly Meeting, 26 – 28 October. At this meeting, Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General of ARACIS, was elected for a new ENQA Vice-president mandate.
- ✓ Meeting of the ENQA Executive Board, 12-13 December.

Furthermore, Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, as member of the Board and vice president of ENQA, attended the Board meetings and other meetings organised by the Association.

3.2.2 Activities at EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ARACIS has the obligation, under the law, to register in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – EQAR and periodically undergo the institutional accreditation procedures envisaged for keeping this status.

ARACIS is registered in EQAR since 2009.

ARACIS's ENQA membership, confirmed after the external evaluation coordinated by ENQA, was an important element in the decision of EQAR, which was based on the organisation's own evaluation, by which the Register's Board approved continuation of the Agency's EQAR registration in 2019, for a period of five years, namely until 30.09.2023.

We specify that ARACIS initiated the targeted review process, recently introduced by ENQA and EQAR, in order to renew the Agency's EQAR registration, by submitting the application

online on 30 September. Within this approach, the Terms of Reference of the external evaluation were agreed in November by ARACIS, ENQA and EQAR.

In 2022, ARACIS initiated an external evaluation for the setting up of a new doctoral study domain; within this context, the Agency was required to develop and submit the "Substantive Change Report" to EQAR and present this new activity; the Report was approved by the EQAR Committee and published on EQAR's webpage in September.

As part of the collaboration between ARACIS and EQAR, the sustainability activities under „The Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR)" Project continued in 2022; the project is coordinated by EQAR, and ARACIS was one of the partner quality assurance agencies.

3.2.3 Activities within the ENAEE - European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

ARACIS is a member of the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE), and since 2013 it is authorised by ENAEE to award the EUR-ACE® Label certification for bachelor study programmes in the field of engineering, accredited based on ARACIS evaluations.

Following the external evaluation process conducted by ENAEE, the EUR-ACE Label Committee approved in 2019 re-authorisation for the Agency to award EUR-ACE Label certification until 31 December 2022.

In line with the provisions of the Guidelines for the authorisation process for EUR-ACE Label certification awarding, ARACIS took action to trigger the periodic evaluation procedure for re-authorisation by ENAEE.

The representative of ARACIS at the EUR-ACE Label Committee is Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Head of ARACIS Accreditation Department.

Thus, between 31 May - 4 June 2022, ENAEE experts conducted the first evaluation visit at the ARACIS headquarters and at "Transilvania" University in Brașov. The second stage of the periodic evaluation of ARACIS, namely the evaluation visit of the ENAEE experts at the "Politehnica" University of Bucharest was carried out between 23-25 November 2022.

Based on the documentation developed by ARACIS, evaluation visits were performed for the awarding of the EUR-ACE® certification. The list of EUR-ACE certified Bachelor programmes with certification granted by ARACIS in 2022 is given below:

Table 20. EUR-ACE certified Bachelor programmes certified by ARACIS in 2022

No.	University	Study programme
1.	"Transilvania" University of Brașov	Mechatronics
2.		Mechanical Engineering
3.		Industrial Design
4.		Railways, Roads and Bridges
5.		Transport and Traffic Engineering
6.		Economic Engineering in Mechanics
7.		Industrial Economic Engineering
8.		Aerospace Constructions
9.		Forestry

No.	University	Study programme
10.		Forest Engineering
11.		Cynegetics
12.		Robotics
13.		Optometry
14.	Politehnica University of Bucharest	Machine construction technology
15.		Welding engineering
16.		Energetics and Environment Technologies
17.	Technical University of Cluj-Napoca	Applied Automatics and Computer Science (in English)

ARACIS was represented at the events organised by ENAEE in 2022, as follows:

- ✓ General Assembly Meeting, 6 May, and the ENAEE-EQAR webinar on exploring possibilities for collaboration, online (participant: Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache);
- ✓ Meeting of the EUR-ACE Label Committee, 20 May (participant: Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache);
- ✓ General Assembly Meeting, 20-21 October (participant: Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache);
- ✓ Meeting of the ENAEE/ EUR-ACE Label Committee, 4 November. At the event, the invitation of ARACIS to host the ENAEE Label Committee meeting at the ARACIS headquarters on 26 May 2023 was accepted.

3.2.4 Activities within CEENQA - Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

ARACIS is a founding member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA).

The Agency is represented at CEENQA by Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Head of ARACIS Accreditation Department.

ARACIS representatives continued to attend the main events organised by CEENQA in 2022, as follows:

- ✓ Bi-monthly meeting (CEENQA Bi-Monthly Meetings), 19 January. At the meeting, the representatives of the quality assurance agencies of Austria (Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria – AQ Austria) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina – HEA) presented their agencies, and AQ Austria representatives shared their experience on conducting external evaluation visits in online format.
- ✓ Bi-monthly meeting,16 March. Mr President, Associate Professor Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu, delivered a presentation on the “External evaluation of doctoral studies” at the meeting. The presentation covered the legal framework based on which the Agency conducted the evaluation of doctoral studies in 2021, a presentation of the human resources involved in the external evaluation process, and an analysis of the results of the evaluation of doctoral studies.

- ✓ Meeting of the CEENQA Board (online), 11 May, and meeting of the network members (online), 18 May 2022;
- ✓ The annual workshop and the CEENQA General Assembly Meeting, 23 – 24 September;
- ✓ Meeting of the CEENQA Board, 9 November. At the event, the invitation of ARACIS to organise the CEENQA Board meeting at the "Transilvania" University of Brașov on 28 April 2023 was accepted.

In November, ARACIS responded to the Call launched by CEENQA to participate in the Staff Exchange Scheme for the period of 2022-2023. The goal of the initiative of the mobility programme proposed by CEENQA is to enable best practice exchanges, provide the opportunity for peer learning, and enable debated on relevant quality assurance topics.

Thus, ARACIS will host and send members of the Agency under the 2023 Staff Mobility Scheme.

3.2.5 Activities within the INQAAHE - International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

Ever since it was established, ARACIS is a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

The Agency is represented at INQAAHE by Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Director of the Accreditation Department at ARACIS, who was elected on Network's Board of Directors in September 2021.

In 2022, ARACIS, through its representatives, continued to participate in the activities and events conducted by INQAAHE.

ARACIS developed and sent for publication in the December 2021 INQAAHE Newsletter (to be released in January 2022) a contribution titled "Evaluation of the third cycle of higher education studies (doctoral studies)".

On 13 November, under the Call for research and innovation project proposals launched by INQAAHE, ARACIS developed and submitted a project proposal on the topic of "Academic Ethical and Integrity Conduct Supported by QAAs". The project aims to analyse how quality assurance agencies evaluate and support compliance with academic ethics and integrity values in higher education institutions. The projects that will be selected for funding by INQAAHE will be announced early in 2023.

3.2.6 Other international collaborations and activities

3.2.6.1 Cooperation with other quality assurance agencies

Within the relationships with other quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area, ARACIS signed the Cooperation Memorandum with the Ukrainian agency for quality assurance in higher education – National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA).

Thus, under the aegis of the Memorandum signed on 25 July 2022, ARACIS and the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA) will work together to develop relevant quality assurance processes that will contribute to improving the quality of the higher

education system, and to expand the existing cooperation between the two quality assurance agencies.

3.2.6.2 Bologna Follow-Up Group – BFUG

The first meeting of the Thematic Group on Quality Assurance (TPG C on Quality Assurance) established within the Bologna Follow-up Group - BFUG was held in May 2022.

We mention that ARACIS represents Romania as co-president of this Group.

Thus, the 2021 – 2024 Action Plan was presented at the meeting, the future activities of the Thematic Group were established, and the following topics were debated: the legal framework in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG); digitalisation of quality assurance processes; an improvement-focused approach of the ESG; cross-border cooperation in quality assurance; internal assurance and the quality culture; European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Furthermore, several quality assurance projects were presented, and proposals were made for the cooperation between the member states of the European Higher Education Area.

The event was attended from ARACIS by Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General, and Mr Petrișor-Laurențiu Țucă, expert in the "Implementation and Innovation in QA through peer learning (IMINQA)" project, developed to support the 2021-2024 proceedings of the Thematic Group on Quality Assurance.

In November 2022, ARACIS, through its representatives, Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Cristina Ghițulică, and Horia Oniță, former member of the ARACIS Council, acting as vice-president of the European Students' Union (ESU), attended the meeting of the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

The progress in the implementation of the 2021-2024 Work Plan was presented at the event. The key aspects discussed concern the development of a system of indicators related to monitoring the implementation of the commitments and reforms in terms of key commitments, fundamental values of the higher education, the social dimension, and teaching and learning.

On 30 November, Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General, and Mr Professor Dr. Eng. attended the second meeting of the Thematic Group on Quality Assurance (TPG C on Quality Assurance) established within the Bologna Follow-up Group - BFUG, which was held online. At this meeting, Mr Professor Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu delivered a presentation titled "Digitalisation of quality assurance processes".

3.2.6.3 The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education - ECA

In July 2022, the ARACIS Council approved the submission of the application for membership of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA). Following approval of ARACIS's application for ECA membership, ARACIS became the 17th member of ECA in September, at the General Meeting of the Consortium, held in Paris on the occasion of ECA Members' Seminar.

Thus, the Agency's representatives attended the training session titled European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, organised by the European Consortium for

Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) and hosted by the Engineer Title Commission (Commission des titres d'ingénieur – CTI) in Paris.

3.2.6.4 Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment

The process of developing the Agreement was initiated in January 2022 and involved more than 350 organisations from more than 40 countries. The participating organisations include universities, research centres, researcher associations, national and regional authorities, quality assurance agencies and other relevant organisations.

Thus, on 4 November 2022, ARACIS signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, which sets a common direction for the changes in research evaluation practices, for researchers and research organisations, with the primary goal of maximising the quality and impact of research.

Signing the agreement was also important for the joining, by ARACIS, of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), whose aim is to achieve a systemic reform of research assessment based on shared principles and commitments, through exchange of information and mutual learning between all those who wish to improve research assessment practices.

CoARA was officially launched on 1 December 2022, on the occasion of the Constitutive Assembly of the members of the Coalition, where the main governing documents were adopted and the Steering Board was established.

3.2.6.5 European Students' Union (ESU)

In March 2022, Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General of ARACIS, attended the training for student evaluators members of the Register of the European Students' Union (ESU) as a trainer, and delivered the presentation on the "Effective engagement of stakeholders in quality assurance processes".

Furthermore, in May 2022, Mrs Director General, Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică attended the meeting of Directors General for Higher Education of the EU Member States and the final conference of the project coordinated by the European Students' Union (ESU), "Bologna With Stakeholders' Eyes For a Future of the Bologna Process (BWSE FORward)", organised in Paris (France).

At the ESU General Assembly Meeting held in the same period, Mr Horia Onița, president of the National Alliance of Student Organisations in Romania, was elected vice-president.

In December 2022, the ARACIS President attended the Autumn Training of the European Students' Union's Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool, where he presented on how stakeholders, especially students, are represented at ARACIS and in the evaluation processes.

3.2.6.6 European Quality Assurance Forum - EQAF 2022

Between 17 – 19 November 2022, for the first time in Romania, the West University of Timișoara hosted the 2022 European Quality Assurance Forum - EQAF, a well-known international conference in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

The event brought together more than 300 specialists from 44 countries and 4 continents, for whom EQAF 2022 was a platform for discussions, professional development, and

exchange of experience between the main stakeholders in quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

The Forum was organised by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Universities Association (EUA), the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE), and the European Students' Union (ESU). The Ministry of Education and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) were partners of the event.

The event was attended by the President of ARACIS, Associate Professor Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu; the Vice-president of ARACIS, Professor Dr. Eng. Valentin Năvrăpescu; the Director of the Accreditation Department, Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache; the Director General, Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică; Oana Țînțar, president of the National Alliance of Student Organisations of Romania (ANOSR) and member of the ARACIS Council, together with many members of the technical staff.

Furthermore, the Director General of ARACIS delivered the plenary session on the topic of "Prospects in Quality Assurance: The Importance of Involving Students in Quality Assurance", where she presented the results of the "Effective Involvement of Stakeholders in External Quality Assurance Activities" – ESQA project.

3.2.6.7 International conference – Institutional accreditation in higher education (Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior - A3ES)

The international conference on the topic of Institutional accreditation of higher education, organised by the Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior - A3ES), was held on 3 October.

The conference hosted presentations on the strategies for institutional evaluation used by A3ES, the challenges that this type of external evaluation poses for the higher education in Portugal, and the experiences of quality assurance agencies in France (HCERES) and Spain (ANECA).

The event was attended from ARACIS by Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General and ENQA Vice-president, who delivered a presentation on "The importance of institutional evaluation".

3.2.6.8 EUA Council for Doctoral Education (EUA CDE)

In December 2022, the ARACIS Council approved initiation of the procedure for ARACIS to join the EUA Council for Doctoral Education – EUA CDE as an affiliate member. EUA-CDE is the largest European network in the field of doctoral education, bringing together the largest community of specialists and leaders in the academic field, from over 260 universities and institutions in 36 countries, whose activities include aspects related to doctoral education and training for research.

4 INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION

4.1 The ARACIS web page

The main means of communicating information concerning the activities of ARACIS is the Agency's web page: ww.aracis.ro; the page was permanently updated in 2022 with information of public interest concerning the results of the evaluations conducted by ARACIS, the schedule of the external evaluation visits, information about recent developments in the Agency's activities, events organised by ARACIS or other activities.

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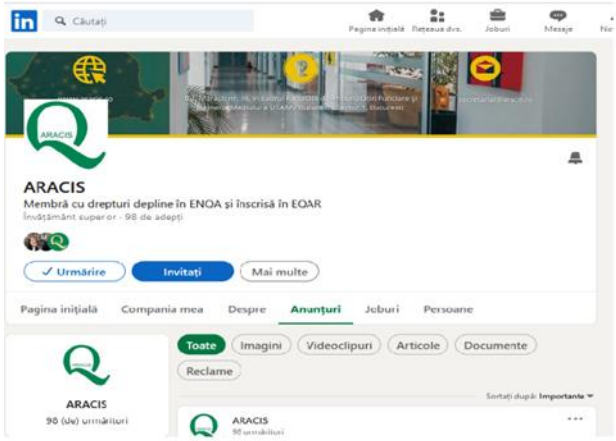
4.2 The ARACIS Facebook page

In 2022, ARACIS continued its activity on the Facebook page by conveying information about the Agency's activities, which was published constantly; at the end of 2022, the ARACIS page reached over 2,500 followers. The Agency will continue in 2023 its actions towards enhancing the transparency of its activities and decisions, and promoting information and dialogue in the field of quality in higher education at national and international level.

4.3 The ARACIS LinkedIn page

In 2022, ARACIS launched a LinkedIn page, aiming to increase the accessibility and visibility of the information on ARACIS's activity internationally, so that it can reach a wider audience interested in higher education quality assurance.

Furthermore, the Agency will continue to promote its events on LinkedIn in 2023, as well as other relevant higher education quality assurance information.



4.4 Newsletter

In 2022, ARACIS continued developing a regular Newsletter (online format), disseminated through publication on the Agency's web page and sending to the representatives of higher education institutions and other stakeholders interested in quality assurance in higher education.

4.5 National press monitoring

In 2022, daily monitoring of the coverage of ARACIS in the national press and centralising of the articles on higher education published in the online press continued, and the resulting "Press Review" was sent to the members of the ARACIS Council and the technical staff of ARACIS.

4.6 Press releases and news

Press releases regarding the activities conducted by ARACIS were drafted and issued in 2022 to disseminate information to the Romanian public.

Information dissemination activities carried out by the Agency also had an international component; paper proposals were sent to INQAAHE to be included in the electronic newsletter published regularly by these organisations, and information regarding ARACIS's activity was sent to ENQA.

4.7 Subscriptions with international publications

To keep up to date with the current status and the trends in quality assurance in higher education in Europe and beyond, and to disseminate its own experiences related to the quality of higher education in Romania, ARACIS uses electronic and printed information means. To keep up to date with the current status and the trends in quality assurance in higher education in Europe and beyond, and to disseminate its own experiences related to the quality of higher education in Romania, ARACIS continued to use electronic and printed information means. Thus, ARACIS extended its subscription to the publication "Internationalisation of Higher Education Developments in the European Higher Education Area and Worldwide" for 2022.

4.8 "Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR)"

For 2022, ARACIS will publish, in the first part of 2023, a volume of the Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR) on the topic of "Social responsibility and quality assurance in higher education".

The QAR is an appreciated academic publication that focuses on aspects concerning quality assurance in higher education in Romania. The Review is intended as an instrument to facilitate practice sharing and communication between internal and external experts, including internationally, and contribute to promoting the development of a quality assurance culture. QAR targets the public interested in the theory, practice and policies in the above-mentioned field. ARACIS enjoyed the support of the ENQA and CEENQA Secretariats to disseminate information on the possibilities and requirements for publishing papers in the QAR.

5 PROJECTS

5.1 International projects - ongoing

5.1.1 The IMINQA project

General presentation

IMINQA is an umbrella project developed to support the 2021-2024 proceedings of the Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance (TPG C on QA) created by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG).

Together with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), ARACIS is a partner in the IMINQA project, and the consortium is led by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training.

The IMINQA project is co-financed under the ERASMUS+ Programme, and it is implemented over a period of 36 months (May 2022 – April 2025); the funding amounts to 499,855 EUR, out of which 43,642 EUR allocated to ARACIS.

Project aim

On one hand, the project focuses on the wider topic of quality assurance, and contributes to the implementation of the key commitment in this field in all the states of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA); on the other hand, it addresses specific topics with an innovative focus, such as micro credentials, quality assurance for European Universities, digitalisation of quality assurance processes.

Work packages and brief description of the activities/expected results

1. Project management, quality assurance, communication, monitoring and evaluation, dissemination
   Ensuring that the project objectives are achieved within the established deadlines, and that the project activities are implemented efficiently and within the approved budget
2. Organising the meetings of the Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance (TPG C)
   The meetings of the Thematic Group are key for achieving the main objectives of the project, especially for the implementation of the key commitment regarding quality assurance within the Bologna Process and innovation in quality assurance systems in the EHEA.
3. Staff mobility
   Implementing a staff mobility scheme, both for representatives of the line ministries and for the staff of quality assurance agencies in the countries members of the TPG C; representatives of stakeholder organisations members of the Group can also participate in the mobility.

   This mobility scheme supports the professional development of the involved staff, as well as peer learning, through job shadowing at the organisations that host the mobility staff or by attending training activities at a quality assurance agency or a ministry from another TPG C country.

4. Peer learning activities
   Implementation of three peer learning activities regarding the priorities of EHEA in terms of quality assurance policies, seeking to catalyse exchanges between national authorities and stakeholders to ensure implementation of such policies.
5. Quality assurance for micro credentials
   Creating the practical tools to ensure the quality of micro credentials and guaranteeing the follow up of the activities of the working group established under the MICROBOL project (implemented between 2019 – 2021)
6. Quality assurance for the European University Alliances
   Starting from the specific tools developed under the EUniQ Project (European framework for comprehensive quality assurance in European Universities and the Implementation Roadmap), an analysis of the legal obstacles existing at national level for the implementation of the aforementioned tools in five EHEA member states will be conducted, as well as a "feasibility study" regarding how the framework created under the EUniQ project can be implemented in each of these states.
7. Digitalisation of quality assurance processes
   Identifying the activities that quality assurance agencies have already implemented for the digitalisation of quality assurance processes (activities of the agencies, external quality assurance procedures, management and data exchange, the impact of COVID, etc.), and making proposals for future lines of action on how digitalisation could support quality assurance procedures and practices in various EHEA countries.

Activities

The main activities carried out under the project in 2022 were:

- 16 May: kick-off meeting of the IMINQA project, held in Leuven (Belgium), attended by ARACIS representatives, Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General and IMINQA Project Manager, and Mr Petrișor-Laurențiu Țucă, project expert.
- 31 August – 2 September: project meeting held in Brussels (Belgium). The activities carried out at the event were:
  - ✓ Meeting of the Selection Committee of the Staff Mobility Programme - The received applications were analysed and, based on the selection procedures and the eligibility criteria, the applications based on which the staff will participate in the mobility scheme were selected.
  - ✓ Peer learning activity 1 - The meeting concerned the range of topics for the review of the national legal frameworks in relation to the ESG provisions. At this meeting, Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică moderated the session on the main obstacles in national legislation, which create difficulties for ESG compliance, and efficient approaches that could support alignment with the ESG in this respect.
  - ✓ Meeting 1 of the Working Group on quality assurance for micro credentials - At the Working Group meeting, the discussions focused on the progress on developing study programmes related to micro credentials in the working group member countries. Furthermore, aspects related to internal quality assurance for micro credentials, as well as potential approaches for external quality assurance for micro credentials were addressed.

- 28 November: second working meeting of the trans-national steering board of the project.

5.1.2 The START project

General presentation

In February 2022, the European Commission approved the project proposal for the "Social inclusion, Tolerance, Acceptance and Realization for all sTudents – START" project, funded under ERASMUS+, where ARACIS is a project partner.

The implementation of the START project is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria, together with the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Bulgaria (NEAA) and the Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants.

The project started on 1 June 2022 and will continue for 36 months, between June 2022 - May 2025.

Specific objectives of the project

The objectives of the project include developing a set of specific policy proposals, tools and legislative changes supporting social inclusion in higher education, and ensuring a required level of understanding of this phenomenon to facilitate the transition to open, more inclusive academic communities. Social inclusion will be supported along three lines of action, namely quality assurance, legal framework, and inclusive academic environment.

Work packages and brief description of the activities/expected results

1. Preparation, management, monitoring and evaluation
   The main objectives of this work package include ensuring that the project objectives are achieved within the established deadlines, and that the project activities are implemented efficiently and within the approved budget.
2. Research, development of a mechanism and policies
   This work package envisages the following activities:
   - ✓ research activities to develop education quality assurance indicators related to the access of students from vulnerable groups, focusing on migrants;
   - ✓ updating the legal framework, and shifting the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) towards learning outcomes;
   - ✓ analysis of the National Framework of Qualifications;
   - ✓ Developing:
     - A register of micro credential providers;
     - A catalogue of micro credentials (short-term courses);
     - A previous learning validation register.
   - ✓ developing a Social Inclusion Guide;
   - ✓ developing a Policy Document (recommendations) regarding the social inclusion of students from vulnerable groups, focusing on migrants, validation of previous learning, micro credentials in the higher education system, ensuring opportunities for trans-national cooperation and participation in European University Alliances.
3. Information events and conferences
   Dissemination of the project results by developing promotion instruments, organising informative events and a conference.

Activities

The main activities conducted under the project in 2022 were held on 3 October, when the ARACIS team attended the kick-off meeting of the START project, held online.

5.2 National and international projects completed - in the sustainability-ensuring period

5.2.1 The QAFIN project

The beneficiary of the "Improvement of public policies in higher education and better-quality regulations through updated quality standards - QAFIN" project was: The Ministry of National Education (MEN) – Project Management Unit for Externally Funded Projects. In 29 May 2017 - 28 October 2021, the Ministry of Education in partnership with ARACIS, with technical assistance from the World Bank implemented the project "*Improvement of public policies in higher education and better-quality regulations through updated quality standards* – QAFIN" (SIPOCA/SMIS code 2014+ 16).

Implementation period: 29.05.2017 - 28.10.2021

Financing: The project is co-funded from the European Social Fund (ESF) through the Administrative Capacity Operational Programme 2014 - 2020, Priority Axis 1: Efficient public administration and judicial system, Specific objective/Operation 1.1: Development and introduction of joint systems and standards in the public administration to optimise citizen- and business environment-oriented decision-making processes, in line with the Public Administration Strengthening Strategy (PASS).

Total eligible value: 14,639,415.97 Lei, out of which 2,344,699.00 Lei is the applicant's contribution covered by LIDER

The purpose of the project was the achievement and implementation of evidence-based public policies, respectively the correlation of strategic planning with programme budgeting, in the field of financing of higher education institutions, through the enhancement of regulations regarding external quality assurance, classification and ranking of higher education institutions and study programmes. Also, the project aims at the improvement of the administrative capacity of the MEN and of ARACIS, by adapting structures, optimizing processes and training human resources, and enhancing the use of transparent public consultation mechanisms that ensure citizen participation in decision-making and by applying European quality standards.

In 2022, under the QAFIN project, ARACIS continued to develop and improve supporting IT instruments for the application of the developed guides, standards and procedures, and improve the IT system for the management of ARACIS's National Register of Evaluators, including the development / optimisation of the ARACIS website.

5.2.2 The DEQAR project

General presentation

The project "Database of External Quality Assurance Results", co-funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ programme, Key Action 3 was coordinated by EQAR; partners

in the project were EQAR-listed quality assurance agencies, important European organisations (including ENQA), and a research partner; ARACIS was one of the partners.

The project was implemented between November 2017 - October 2019.

Project aim

The aim of the project was to develop a database to improve access to information on higher education institutions/higher education study programmes that were subject to external quality evaluations, in compliance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The participation of ARACIS in the project, as an EQAR-listed agency, was the result of the Agency's decision to contribute to the internationalisation of the Romanian higher education, by providing full information on the results of the external education quality evaluations that it conducts.

Activities

The DEQAR database was built from the ID of the higher education institutions contained in the ETER (European Tertiary Education Register). ETER is an initial database of European higher education institutions, still under construction, created at the initiative of the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission. ARACIS participates in the ETER as a focal point of the Ministry of Education for Romania, with project management, through the representative of the European consortium implementing the ETER, from the Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland.

DEQAR collects and provides direct access to the reports and decisions of all quality assurance agencies listed in the EQAR, which contributes to the transparency of the results of external evaluations and facilitates recognition of the higher education qualifications.

In 2022, the process of sending the evaluation reports of the evaluations of higher education programmes and institutional evaluations carried out in 2022 to DEQAR continued.

5.2.3 The ESQA project

General presentation

The project "Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities (ESQA)" was funded under the Erasmus + Programme, Key Action 3 – Support for (educational) policy reforms.

The project was implemented between May 2019 - June 2021.

In this project, ARACIS was a partner in the consortium led by the Ministry of Education (ME) as the national authority; the consortium included three European organisations that represent quality assurance (ENQA), universities (EURASHE) and students (ESU), along four other quality assurance agencies from France, Bulgaria, Denmark and the Republic of Moldova. The project was proposed in 2018 to support the Peer Support Group PS - C Quality Assurance created by the Bologna Follow-Up Group - BFUG to respond to the requirements of the topic concerning the Role and involvement of stakeholders in internal quality assurance, which was identified to require additional activities and clarifications.

Project aim

The project was concerned with how the involvement of wider categories of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities can be increased, starting by identifying a wider definition of the concept of "stakeholders", as well as the ways in which their interest to participate in activities for quality assurance in higher education institutions could be encouraged.

Specific objectives of the project

Increase the quality of higher education, in correlation with the beneficiaries' expectations, namely students, employers, and the whole society. ARACIS aimed at extending the concept of "stakeholder" and identifying a specific way, in line with the social-economic state of facts in Romania, in which such stakeholders could be involved in the external evaluation process.

Results

The main results achieved in this project are available at: https://www.esqa.ro

In 2022, activities were organised to disseminate the results of the project at the 2022 European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF), which was held in Timișoara between 17 - 19 November.

On the second day of the forum, the Director General of ARACIS, Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, together with Ana Gvritishvili, member of the ESU Executive Board, delivered the plenary session on "Prospects on quality assurance: The importance of involving students in quality assurance".

At this plenary session, the ARACIS Director General also presented the results of the ESQA project.

6. ACTIVITY SELF-ASSESSMENT IN 2022

The current activities continued in compliance with the regulations in force with a view to carrying out the mission undertaken by the Agency.

ARACIS' mission is to carry out the quality external evaluation of education provided by higher education institutions and by other organisations providing higher education study programmes. In this respect, the statistics of the external evaluations performed by ARACIS in 2022 is as follows:

- 22 institutional evaluations were completed, with 16 "*High degree of confidence*" qualifications, three "*Confidence*" qualifications, two *"Limited degree of confidence*" qualifications, and one "*No confidence*" qualification awarded. Throughout the last 5 years of activity (between 2018-2022), ARACIS evaluated 72 institutions.
- 409 bachelor study programmes were evaluated in total, for all forms of education, namely: 92.7% - full-time education; 2.3% - part-time education, and 5% - remote education The profile of the evaluated bachelor study programmes shows a high level of maturity of external evaluations, with 76.88% (339 programmes) subject to "*Periodic evaluation*", and only 11.56% evaluated for each "*Accreditation*" and "*Provisional authorisation*". Overall, in terms of the qualifications obtained, 94.8% of the evaluations obtained the highest qualification, namely: 95.0% - *Maintaining accreditation*, 92.1% - *Accreditation* and 96.1% - *Authorisation*.

1649 bachelor study programmes were evaluated between 2018 – 2022. In a historical comparison of the evaluations of bachelor study programmes in that period, the share of programmes being awarded the maximum qualification is as follows: in 2018, 93.7%; in 2019, 96.44%; in 2020, 92.63%; 96.1% in 2021, and 94.4% in 2022.

- 149 master study domains were evaluated, and accreditation was withdrawn for two domains. Seven master study programmes were accredited in new domains, and 69 were classified under existing domains:
- in 2022, ARACIS continued the external evaluation of doctoral studies[2], and evaluated 16 doctoral study domains;
- the list of external evaluations carried out in 2022 ends with the evaluation of "*Preparatory year programmes of Romanian language for foreigners*", for which five evaluations were requested, all for programmes seeking to maintain their accreditation.

The recommendations and observations included in ENQA's Report (2018) continued to be implemented: The 2022-2026 ARACIS Strategy, published on the Agency's webpage, was the document based on which the actions and steps undertaken by the Agency were decided.

In 2022, the activities aimed at developing the Agency's webpage continued, and the reports are published on the webpage in a keyword-searchable format.

Implementation of measures for internal quality assurance continued:

- ✓ adjustment of the elements required for improving how the information received from universities is processed and used, based on the feedback questionnaire collected by ARACIS from the evaluated institutions;
- ✓ drafting and approving of the internal system and operational procedures. Implementation of the provisions of the internal system and operational procedures continued in 2022, and it remains a constant activity, as it is a major component of the internal quality assurance system.

Regarding the projects, activities were carried out in 2022 for the implementation of two national projects and to ensure sustainability of three other projects:

- The *IMINQA* project is co-financed under the ERASMUS+ Programme, and it is implemented over a period of 36 months (May 2022 - April 2025); the funding amounts to 499,855 EUR, out of which 43,642 EUR allocated to ARACIS.
- The *START* project is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria, together with the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Bulgaria (NEAA) and the Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants. The project started on 1 June 2022 and will continue for 36 months, between June 2022 - May 2025.
- The *"Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating the QAFIN quality standards"* project, in partnership with the Ministry of Education - Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects. Implementation period: 29.05.2017 - 28.10.2021.

[2] The first year when doctoral studies were evaluated by ARACIS was 2021

- The "*Database of External Quality Assurance Results*" project, co-funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ programme, Key Action 3 was coordinated by EQAR; partners in the project were EQAR-listed quality assurance agencies, important European organisations (including ENQA), and a research partner; ARACIS was one of the partners. The project was implemented between November 2017 - October 2019.
- The project "*Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities (ESQA)*" was funded under the Erasmus + Programme, Key Action 3 – Support for (educational) policy reforms. The project was implemented between May 2019 - June 2021.

The structure of the permanent staff in the Agency's internal directions and services changed significantly in terms of the number of positions and the people employed.

The financial activity of the Agency was appropriate and supported its mission. Continued analysis of evaluation costs and re-correlation with salary increases and other measures to keep up with the changes in the law continue to be necessary.

The enhanced international visibility of the Agency contributes to connecting the Romanian higher education to the SEÎS by:

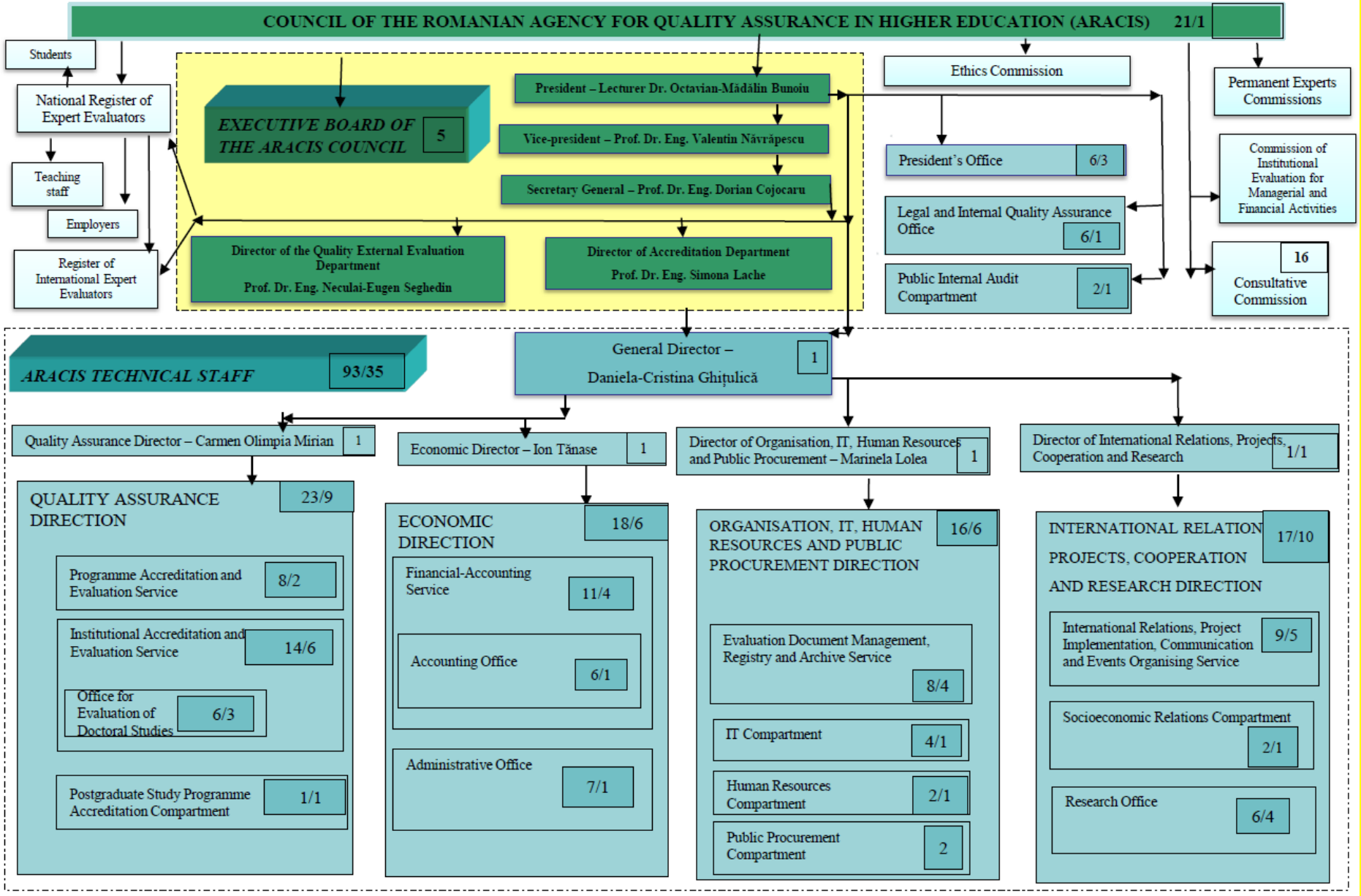
- ✓ implementing activities to ensure the sustainability of the DEQAR project of the European Commission;
- ✓ Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General of ARACIS, continuing to carry out her mandate as Vice-president of ENQA;
- ✓ Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Director of the Accreditation Department of ARACIS, continued her activity on the board of INQAAHE and CEENQA, and continued to represent ARACIS in the ENAEE structures. Professor Lache is the ARACIS representative on the EUR-ACE Label Committee;
- ✓ continued publication of the QAR magazine no. 12, with the recommended topic "*Is Online Education Here to Stay? How quality assurance should adapt?* which contains contributions of authors from Romania and from other countries.

It is appropriate to mention that the quality and intensity of ARACIS's activity has improved in 2022 as a result of the measures taken by the Agency and the inclusion of the ENQA and EQAR recommendations; this is a trend that remains constant, in line with the requests and aspirations that all stakeholders have in connection with quality assurance in higher education.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 – ARACIS organisational structure

ORGANISATIONAL CHART OF ARACIS *(approved by the Council's Decision no. 105/25.11.2021)*



Annex 2 – Members of the ARACIS Council - 2022

Position	Name, surname
President:	1. Associate Professor Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu
Vice-President:	2. Prof. Dr. Eng. Valentin Năvrăpescu
Secretary General:	3. Professor Dr. Eng. Dorian Cojocaru
Director of the Quality External Evaluation Department:	4. Professor Dr. Eng. Neculai Eugen Seghedin
Quality External Evaluation Department	5. Professor Dr. Ionescu Ecaterina 6. Professor Dr. Opre Adrian 7. Professor Dr. Eng. Petrescu Marius 8. Professor Dr. Prelipcean Gabriela 9. Professor Dr. Eng. Trașcă Teodor-Ioan 10. Dr. Eng. Erbașu Romeo-Cristian 11. Student Horia Oniță /Student Tânțar Oana Alexandra
Director of the Accreditation Department:	12. Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache
Accreditation Department:	13. Professor Dr. Nagy Ladislau 14. Professor Dr. Eng. Hadăr Anton 15. Professor Dr. Anton Mihail 16. Professor Dr. Ciolan Lucian-Ion 17. Professor Dr. Mihai Florin 18. Professor Dr. Roman Teodora Cristina 19. Professor Dr. Vidican Roxana 20. Student Zamfir Ciprian-Constantin

Appendix 3 – ARACIS Advisory Board

No.	Name and surname	Institution	Position
1	Academician Ioan-Aurel Pop	"Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca	President of Honour
2	Professor Dr. George Darie	Politehnica University of Bucharest	Member
3	Professor Dr. Laurențiu Rece	Constructions Technical University of Bucharest	Member
4	Professor Dr. Valentina Tudor	Agronomy Science and Veterinarian Medicine University of Bucharest	Member
5	Professor Dr. Romiță Iucu-Bumbu	University of Bucharest	Member
6	Professor Dr. Ioan Lascăr	"Carol Davila" Medicine and Pharmacy University of Bucharest	Member
7	Professor Dr. Mirela Stoian	Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest	Member
8	Professor Dr. Dan Dediu	National Music University of Bucharest	Member
9	Professor Dr. Marko Balint	"Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca	Member
10	Professor Dr. Dan Selișteanu	University of Craiova	Member
11	Professor Dr. Iulian Ciocoiu	"Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi	Member
12	Professor Dr. Viorel Negru	West University of Timișoara	Member
13	Professor Dr. Vasile Căruțașu	"Nicolae Bălcescu" Terrestrial Forces Academy of Sibiu	Member

No.	Name and surname	Institution	Position
14	Professor Dr. Ovidiu Folcuț	Romanian-American University of Bucharest	Member
15	Professor Dr. Florentina Munteanu	"Academica Plus" University Consortium "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad	Member
16	Professor Dr. Viorel Șerban	Romanian Alliance of Technical Universities – ARUT Politehnica University of Timișoara	Member

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