

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in
Higher Education



GUIDE

for carrying out external quality assessment
procedures in order to maintain accreditation and
granting EUR-ACE® certification to a bachelor's
study programme

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1. Purpose

The Higher Education Law no. 199/2023, as subsequently amended and supplemented, establishes in art. 249 para. (1) letter d), among the attributions of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), that it "*develops and makes public its own internal procedures for external evaluation of the quality of education*". In accordance with art. 20 para. (2) of the *Methodology for External Evaluation of the Quality of Education in Higher Education*, approved by Government Decision no. 962/2024, hereinafter referred to as *the Methodology*, "ARACIS approves, by decision of the ARACIS Council, the guidelines on the procedures for conducting the evaluation processes, the standards and performance indicators for external evaluation, established according to the provisions of para. (1), hereinafter referred to as guides, which it publishes, by posting on its own website."

This *Guide for carrying out external quality assessment procedures in order to maintain accreditation and grant EUR-ACE® certification to a bachelor's degree program*, hereinafter referred to as *the Guide*, concretizes the provisions of Law no. 199/2023, as subsequently amended and supplemented, of the *Methodology* and of the *EUR-ACE® Standards and Guidelines (EAFSG)*¹.

The Guide applies to *the periodic external evaluation procedure for maintaining accreditation*, described in art. 55 para. (1) and (4) of the *Methodology*, **in the case of all forms of organization of bachelor's study programmes in the field of engineering sciences**, when the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education carries out the external quality assessment procedure and the higher education institution has applied for the granting of *EUR-ACE® certification*.

The Guide describes the applicable regulatory framework, the steps of the procedure, the mid-term evaluation work and the decision-making process, and includes the following annexes:

- ✓ Annex 1 Standards and indicators for external quality assessment for periodic assessment and granting EUR-ACE® certification to a bachelor's degree programme
- ✓ Annex 2 Structure of the Internal Evaluation Report (IER)
- ✓ Annex 3 Format Request for the initiation of the external evaluation procedure
- ✓ Annex 4 Recommendations on the activities to be carried out during the on-site visit
- ✓ Annex 5 Structure of the External Evaluation Report (EER)
- ✓ Annex 6 Structure of the Progress Report (PR)
- ✓ Annex 7 Structure of the Follow-Up Evaluation Report (FER)
- ✓ Annex 8 Correspondence between the subjects included in the curriculum of the curriculum and the learning areas provided by the EAFSG

In accordance with Article 3 paragraph 1 of the *Methodology*, the purpose of the external evaluation process of the quality of education is to:

- a) attesting the capacity of higher education institutions, respectively of education provider organizations to meet the expectations of beneficiaries, by meeting the standards;
- b) ensuring the protection of the direct and indirect beneficiaries of university and postgraduate education, respectively, as well as of continuing education, by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent and credible, publicly accessible information on the quality of education in higher education.

In art. 229 para. (5) and art. 223 para. (3) of Law no. 199/2023, as subsequently amended and supplemented, it is established that the external evaluation process analyzes the concordance between

¹ www.enaee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/EAFSG-04112021-English-1-1.pdf

the internal evaluation of the quality of education and the real situation, through a multi-criteria examination of the extent to which the programs provided by a higher education institution, respectively an education provider organization, meet the standards.

2. Applicable regulatory framework

The legal framework for the exercise of the education, research and continuing training process in higher education institutions, under the authority of the Romanian state, and which regulates the structure, organization and functioning of higher education in Romania, the status of higher education personnel, as well as the legal framework for quality assurance is represented by *the Higher Education Law no. 199/2023*, as subsequently amended and supplemented.

"A university study program operates legally if it is provisionally authorized or accredited and operates under the conditions established by the act of authorization, respectively of accreditation", in accordance with the provisions of art. 30 para. (3) of *Law no. 199/2023*, as subsequently amended and supplemented, and **the provisional operating authorization and accreditation shall be carried out separately** for each form of education, for each language of instruction/association of two or more languages of instruction within the same study program and for each administrative-territorial unit in which it is carried out. For education in the language of national minorities, the authorization/accreditation is carried out separately for each form of education, for each language of the national minority and for each geographical space in which it takes place, as established in para. (4) and (5) of art. 30 of the same normative act.

Interested higher education institutions will request ARACIS for evaluation in order to grant the EUR-ACE® certification, together with the request for the periodic external evaluation of the respective study programs.

In accordance with art. 232 of *Law no. 199/2023*, as subsequently amended and supplemented, *"The maintenance of the accreditation of a study program is carried out through periodic evaluation every 5 years"*.

In the period between the external quality assessment processes, the higher education institution/education provider organisation benefits from quality assurance support from ARACIS in an interim evaluation process.

Bachelor's degree programs are organized in accordance with the provisions of Articles 26, 33 and 54 – 56 of *Law no. 199/2023*, as subsequently amended and supplemented.

Thus, in accordance with art. 26 of *Law no. 199/2023*, as subsequently amended and supplemented, the bachelor's degree programs are organized within the first cycle and are part of the initial training in higher education. Art. 33 para. (2) of *Law no. 199/2023* establishes that *"bachelor's degree programs can be organized in the following forms of education: full-time, part-time and distance learning"*.

In accordance with art. 54 of *Law no. 199/2023*, as subsequently amended and supplemented, *"Bachelor's degree programs represent the first cycle of university studies and correspond to a number between a minimum of 180 and a maximum of 240 transferable study credits, according to ECTS/SECT, or between a minimum of 240 and a maximum of 300 credits, in the case of double specialization, and ends with level 6 of the CNC"*.

3. Indicators used in external quality assessment

"ARACIS establishes, based on consultation with higher education institutions, which of the external evaluation performance standards and indicators, provided in the annex, are used for the evaluation of the university study programs/fields in each study cycle, as well as for the study programs within continuing education and continuing education, related to higher education", as specified by art. 20 para. (1) of the *Methodology*.

For the procedures regarding the maintenance of the PSUL accreditation and EUR-ACE® certification, the performance indicators contained in **the Annex to the *Methodology*, section II**, completed in correlation with the EAFSG and included in **Annex 1** to the Guide, shall apply.

4. Steps of the external quality assessment procedure

4.1. Preparation and submission of the Internal Evaluation Report (REI), as an annex to the request for the initiation of the external evaluation procedure

The higher education institution (HEI), hereinafter referred to as the applicant institution (SI), within the internal quality assurance processes, carries out, based on its own standards, as well as in accordance with the standards provided in the Annex to the Methodology, the self-assessment, which is concluded with an internal evaluation report (IER). It is drawn up in Romanian, has the structure specified in **Annex 2** to this Guide, and, as a rule, does not exceed 50 pages (without annexes). IER also includes the information necessary to estimate the maximum number of students who can be enrolled, as well as to verify the fulfillment of *the standards*² developed by ARACIS based on art. 32 para. (1) letter a) and para. (3) of *Law no. 199/2023, as subsequently amended and supplemented*.

It is recommended to limit the number of annexes and to make in-text references, through links, to documents published on the SI website, in line with the obligations relating to the transparency of information of public interest.

The SI submits to ARACIS an **application for the initiation of the external quality assessment procedure**, hereinafter referred to as **the application**, drawn up according to the model in **Annex 3** to this Guide, to which it attaches the **REI** and **the certificate regarding the registration/updating of the study program** in the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (RNCIS).³ The SI designates a **contact person** for the external quality assessment process, whom it indicates in the request for initiating the procedure, and ARACIS provides support in terms of the procedure through **the expert from the Quality Assurance Department (DAC)** responsible for the activity of the Specialized Permanent Commission (SPC) to which the PSUL is assigned the field of license.

In the case of subsidiaries established according to art. 8 para. (4) of Law no. 199/2023, as subsequently amended and supplemented, the Corporation Tax attaches to the application **the proof of compliance with the legal regulations of the country where the study program is organized**.

The application must be submitted digitally, to solicitari.evaluate@aracis.ro address, or completed online. The REI, together with the related annexes, shall be submitted in digital format, by uploading to the electronic assessment platform.

In order to ensure an optimal conduct of the evaluation procedure, the applicant institution is recommended to submit the application at least **9 months** and no later than **12 months** before the deadline for completing the evaluation. These deadlines are established in accordance with the provisions of Articles 237 and 232 of Law no. 199/2023, as subsequently amended and supplemented, and are detailed in section 2 of the Guide.

The DAC expert and the representative of the *Institutional Relations and Informatization Service (SRII)* provide support in the process of publishing the internal evaluation documents on the platform. The DAC expert verifies their compliance with the provisions of the Guide. If the REI is not compliant, the inspector requests the IS to redo or complete the documents, within a maximum of **15** days from the submission of the application.

ARACIS, through *SRII*, sends **the civil contract for the provision of external evaluation services** to the IS for

² Quality standards regarding the way of carrying out teaching, learning, research, practical applications and evaluation, in the form of full-time education, through the use of specific electronic, computer and synchronous communication resources (<https://www.aracis.ro/modul-mixt/>); Specific quality standards for the dual organization form of bachelor's/master's degree programs (https://www.aracis.ro/standarde_specifice_invatamant_dual/); Specific quality standards regarding the manner of carrying out the activities related to the university study programs in the form of full-time organization, from the first cycle of studies, differentiated in relation to the fields of study. Other standards developed and adopted by ARACIS will be added.

³ According to the METHODOLOGY of June 20, 2023 for the registration and registration of higher education qualifications in the National Register of Higher Education Qualifications (RNCIS), approved by [Order 4.494/2023](#).

signature, within **7 days** from the receipt of the request. The civil contract **for the provision of external evaluation services**, hereinafter referred to as **the contract**, includes clauses regarding the applicable regulatory framework, the parties involved, the duration and manner of its modification, the value, the obligations of the parties, the manner of communication, the confidentiality of information and the protection of personal data, termination, force majeure, appeals, petitions and disputes, as well as any other elements necessary for the provision of services evaluation.

4.2. Establishment of the composition and appointment of the committee of experts in external quality assessment

ARACIS appoints, within a maximum of **30 days** from the signing of the contract, a **commission of experts in external quality assessment**, hereinafter referred to as **the commission**, composed of:

- a) an expert evaluator, a teacher, a member of the National Register of Experts – Teachers (RNE-CD) of ARACIS, usually a member of the CPS, who has the role of coordinator of the commission;
- b) 1 (one) expert evaluator, teacher who is member of the RNE-CD of ARACIS, who has the role of member of the commission;
- c) 1 (one) member of the Employers' Register;
- d) 1 (one) student, member of the National Register of Experts – Students (RNE-S) of ARACIS, who has the role of member of the commission.

The conditions for the election, as well as the method of appointment of the members of the commission are established by a specific procedure, which is approved by the ARACIS Council and published on the agency's website.

The list of members of the commission shall be sent for information to the SI, which may request, within a maximum of **5 days** from the receipt of the information address, the replacement of one or more members, in duly justified situations.

4.3. Analysis of the internal evaluation report and request for possible clarifications/additional information

Within a maximum of **10 days** from the appointment of the members of the commission, the IER is made available to them, by granting access to the ARACIS evaluation platform. The DAC expert shall provide support to the members of the commission in accessing the IER.

The members of the commission shall analyse the IER and, within a maximum of **20 days** from accessing the report in the evaluation platform, may request from the SI, if necessary, clarifications or additional information on the elements mentioned in the report. The SI responds to these requests within a maximum of **10 days**.

4.4. Conduct of the on-site visit

The contact person on behalf of the SI and the coordinator of the commission agree on the date of the on-site visit, within a maximum of **60 days** from the signing **of the contract**. The visit takes place within a maximum of **3.5 months** from the signing of the contract. The duration of the visit is 2-3 days, and the schedule of the on-site visit is usually established at least **30 days** before the visit.

During the on-site visit, the committee verifies the reality of the information contained in the IER, including by visiting the spaces where learning, teaching and research activities are carried out, and discusses with SI representatives and stakeholders in order to analyse the fulfilment of the standards and performance indicators. The commission will also have discussions with representatives of the SI management, with the PSUL coordinator, with students, graduates, teachers, employers or other interested parties.

Annex 4 to this Guide contains recommendations on the activities carried out during the visit. During the on-site visit, depending on the findings, the members of the commission may request additional meetings, if it is considered that there is insufficient data to substantiate the assessments regarding the fulfilment of the standards and performance indicators. The requests will be made in such a way that the SI has a

reasonable time to organize them.

The coordinator of the commission leads the discussions during the on-site visit and considers the balanced involvement of all participants in the discussions. In this regard, it is recommended that the number of participants in a meeting should not exceed 10 - 12 people; The name and position, respectively the capacity in which each person participates in the respective meeting, shall be communicated to the coordinator of the commission before the visit. Only people from the category related to the respective meeting, announced prior to the meeting, will participate in the meetings.

One of the members of the commission draws up the minutes of the meetings.

The commission's visit to the territory ends with a session in which preliminary conclusions and recommendations are presented, without references to the degree of fulfillment of the standards.

During the on-site visit, the coordinator of the commission may request additional information and documents, to the extent that they are already held by the SI by the nature of its activity, or they may be made and transmitted until the end of the visit.

In exceptional cases, thoroughly substantiated, with the approval of the ARACIS Council, the on-site visit or certain activities within it may also be carried out in online or hybrid format.

4.5. Elaboration of the External Evaluation Report (REE) and assessments on the fulfillment of the indicators

The Commission shall draw *up the External Evaluation Report*, hereinafter referred to as the EER, no later than **20 days** after the completion of the on-the-spot visit. It contains the presentation of the state of affairs, analyses and conclusions regarding the degree of fulfillment of the indicators, based on the data and evidence presented, in relation to the definition of the performance indicators, the corresponding standards, as well as, as the case may be, the standards defined in art. (1) letters b) and c) of the *Methodology*. The EER is based on the IER analysis, the findings of the on-site visit and the additional documents submitted by the end of the visit.

In accordance with art. 63 para. (2) of the *Methodology*, the results of the evaluation for each performance indicator are materialized as follows:

- a) **fulfilled**, when all the aspects contained in its description are achieved;
- b) **partially fulfilled**, when essential aspects contained in its description are not achieved but can be remedied within 1 year at the latest;
- c) **unfulfilled**, when all aspects of its description are not and there are no premises that they can be achieved within 1 year at the latest.

The EER also includes recommendations for improving future work under the SUMP, at least for indicators considered partially met or not met. The recommendations take into account the context in which the PSUL takes place, as well as specific elements such as those related to the field of university studies, the location where it takes place, the profile of the students. They must be able to be implemented in the period up to the mid-term evaluation or periodic evaluation, and be expressed in concrete terms, so that the SI knows exactly what it needs to do to implement each recommendation.

The EER shall be drafted in accordance with the format in **Annex 5** to this guide, in Romanian. The coordinator of the commission develops the EER, in the ARACIS evaluation platform, with the participation of the members of the commission, in a collaborative format. It is recommended that the EER does not exceed **25 pages**, not including annexes. The schedule of the on-site visit is attached, as well as the list of documents consulted.

4.6. SI consultation on REE

Within a maximum of **25 days** from the end of the on-site visit, the coordinator of the commission shall send the draft REE to the contact person for the PSUL, in order to formulate observations on possible material errors.

The response formulated by the SI is sent by the contact person to the coordinator of the commission within

a maximum of **10 days** from the receipt of the draft EER. The Commission finalises the EER within a maximum of **5 days**, integrating, if necessary, the comments received, after which the Commission Coordinator informs the DAC expert on the completion of the report, which is available on the evaluation platform.

4.7. Analysis in the Specialized Permanent Commission and the proposal for a decision

The DAC expert ensures access to the EER, on the evaluation platform, for the members of the SPC to which the field of undergraduate university studies to which the PSUL belongs is assigned. If necessary, in the case of programmes that are interdisciplinary in nature, at the request of the President of the SPC, the DAC expert shall also submit the REE for analysis to the members of another or other SPCs.

The SPC analyzes the REE and may ask the members of the commission to complete and/or redo it, if it finds that the provisions of the Methodology and/or the Guide have not been complied with or if it does not contain sufficient data and evidence for the adoption of the decision. The Commission responds to the request within a maximum of **15 days**.

The SPC shall debate the REE in session, validate the results of the assessment on the degree of fulfilment of the performance indicators and adopt the proposal for a decision, under the conditions described in section 4.8, by open vote, with a majority of votes, in relation to the total number of members entitled to vote. The proposal for a decision shall be recorded in a **record which** shall include the justification for the proposed decision as well as the summary of the debates within the SPC. The analysis in the SPC is completed within a maximum of **30 days** from the receipt of the final version of the EER.

4.8. Analysis by the Department of Evaluation of University Studies and ARACIS Council and adoption of the decision

After the adoption of the proposal for a decision according to section 4.7, the access of the members of the ARACIS Council to the REE and to the minutes of the SPC on the evaluation platform, by the DAC expert, shall be ensured. Within a maximum of **15 days** from the receipt of the minutes of the SPC, the members of the Department for the Evaluation of University Studies (DESU) analyze the proposed decision in the meeting. The summary of the debates and the opinion of the DESU on the proposed decision are recorded in **the Minutes** of the meeting.

The ARACIS Council analyzes the SPC proposal and the opinion of the DESU, within a maximum of **15 days** from the receipt of the SPC report, and validates the proposed decision, based on the verification of compliance *with the Methodology*, by open vote, with a majority of votes, in relation to the total number of members.

The ARACIS Council may request the SPC to redraw the minutes, if it finds that the provisions *of the Methodology* have not been complied with or if the proposal for a decision is not properly justified. Also, the ARACIS Council may ask the members of the commission to redo the REE, if it finds that the provisions *of the Methodology* and/or of this Guide have not been complied with or if it does not contain sufficient data and evidence for the adoption of the decision. The SPC, respectively the commission, responds to the request within a maximum of **15 days**.

Based on the final versions of the REE, the minutes of the SPC meeting and the minutes of the DESU meeting, the ARACIS Council validates, by open vote, the commission's proposal and adopts the decision on whether or not to meet the standards. The decision shall be communicated to the SI and the Ministry of Education and Research, by e-mail, within a maximum of **45 days** from its adoption.

In accordance with art. 63 para. (3) of the *Methodology*, a decision on non-compliance with the standards is adopted when:

- "a) a standard is not met, except for the performance indicators related to the criterion provided in art. 226 para. (4) *letter h*) of Law no. 199/2023, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- b) more than 20% of the performance indicators included in the annex are partially met;

c) more than 10% of the performance indicators included in the Annex are partially fulfilled and are part of the same evaluation area."Also, in para. (4) of the same article it is specified that "For non-fulfillment of the performance indicators related to the criterion provided for in art. 226 para. (4) letter h) of Law no. 199/2023, as subsequently amended and supplemented, art. 226 para. (3) letter b) or c)."

A standard is not met when all the indicators by which it is described are not met. If there are performance indicators that have been assessed as unfulfilled, unless the non-fulfillment of the indicators determines the non-fulfillment of a standard, they will be taken into account for the analysis regarding the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the standards, under the conditions of art. 63 para. (3) letters b) and c) of the *Methodology*.

Thus, a decision on non-compliance with standards is taken when a standard is not met or under the conditions presented in the table below:

Evaluation procedure	Total number of indicators	Number of performance indicators partially met/not met	
		That are part of any area of assessment	That are part of the same field
According to the Annex to the Methodology, section II (except standard S.C.3.2. and indicator I.P.C.3.2.1.)	38	More than 8	more than 4
Maintaining Accreditation	38	More than 8	more than 4

In accordance with art. 13 para. (5) of the *Methodology*, ARACIS, if it finds in a EER the non-fulfillment of the standards within the evaluation process for the maintenance of the accreditation of a study program, communicates this fact, within **15 days** from the date of finding in the external evaluation report, to the Ministry of Education and Research, which, in turn, informs the requesting institution, within **30 days** from the date of receipt of the communication from ARACIS.

Following the completion of the accreditation procedure by a PSUL, the ARACIS Council adopts, as the case may be, one of the following decisions:

- maintenance of accreditation (MAC) and granting of EUR-ACE® certification/maintenance of EUR-ACE® certification**, in case of finding that the standards are met;
- conditional maintenance of accreditation (CMAC) and maintenance of EUR-ACE® certification**, in case of non-compliance with standards. In this case, the SI has the obligation to request a new evaluation from ARACIS, **within 1 year** from the date of information by the Ministry of Education and Research, according to the provisions of art. 60 para. (3) of the *Methodology*.
- withdrawal of accreditation (WAC) and non-granting of EUR-ACE® certification/withdrawal of EUR-ACE® certification**, in case of non-compliance with the standards, following the assessment required according to letter b).

The granting of the EUR-ACE® certification necessarily implies the fulfillment of the indicators: I.P.A.2.1.1, I.P.B.2.1.2, I.P.B.4.1.1, I.P.B.5.1.1, I.P.B.5.1.2, I.P.B.6.1.1, I.P.C.1.1.1, I.P.C.3.1.1, I.P.C.3.1.2 provided in Annex 1 to the Guide.

4.9. Appeals and notifications

Appeals and notifications regarding the result of the evaluation or the conduct of the evaluation procedure shall be resolved according to the specific procedure, available at https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Procedura-de-solutionare-a-contestatiilor-si-sesizarilor_28.10.2022.pdf

4.10. Publication of REE

After the adoption of the final decision by the ARACIS Council and following the resolution of the appeals, if applicable, the EER and the Decision of the ARACIS Council shall be published on the ARACIS website, on the DEQAR website and the registration in the ENAEE database shall be made. The report will include the names of the external quality assessment experts who served on the commission.

5. Mid-term evaluation activities (follow-up)

5.1. Purpose

The mid-term evaluation process aims to support the SI in the process of ensuring the quality of the activities carried out within the PSUL. It also analyzes the extent to which the recommendations made during the external evaluation procedure are implemented by the SI, respectively verifies the remedy of the aspects corresponding to the performance indicators evaluated as partially fulfilled.

5.2. Preparation and submission of the progress report

Following a decision of maintaining accreditation, the SI has the obligation to submit to ARACIS a progress report (PR), by uploading it to the electronic evaluation platform, no later than **two years, but not less than one year**, from the communication of the ARACIS Council Decision.

It details the way in which the SI has implemented the recommendations formulated in the EER and is prepared according to **Annex 6** to this Guide.

5.3. Appointment of the expert evaluator, and preparation and discussion of the follow-up evaluation report

The PR is analysed by an expert in external quality assessment, usually from among those involved in the PSUL external quality assessment procedure. If the progress report is not complete or does not contain sufficient data and evidence, the expert shall request clarifications and/or additions from the assessed institution.

The expert prepares his or her own follow-up evaluation report (FER), according to **Annex 7** to this Guide, on the ARACIS electronic evaluation platform. The content of FER is discussed with SI representatives in a meeting, which is usually held online. A joint meeting can also be scheduled, with several HEIs or OFEs, for bachelor's study programmes in the same field of undergraduate studies, in order to share experience and good practices.

5.4. Change in the maximum number of students who can be enrolled

In accordance with the provisions of art. 58 para. (3) of the *Methodology*, the SI may request the modification of the maximum number of students who can be enrolled, within the mid-term evaluation process, in the case of periodic evaluation procedures. In this case, the expert evaluator formulates assessments on the fulfillment of the performance indicators that were judged as partially fulfilled during the external evaluation procedure, taking into account the maximum number of students that can be enrolled that the SI requires.

The request can be approved only if it is found that all the performance indicators are met.

5.5. Validation of the mid-term evaluation report

The SPC analyzes in the meeting and validates the interim evaluation report. The results of the validation are recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

If it is requested to change the maximum number of students that can be enrolled, the PSC draws up a report by which it makes a reasoned decision on the validation or invalidation of the findings of the expert in the external quality assessment within the mid-term evaluation.

The minutes of the SPC are analyzed within the DESU and the ARACIS Council, the Council issuing a decision on the modification of the maximum number of students that can be enrolled. The decision shall be communicated to the SI and the Ministry of Education and Research, by e-mail, within a maximum of **45 days** from its adoption.

The follow-up evaluation report is published on the ARACIS website.

Approved by

ARACIS Council Decision no. 144 /H/05.06.2025