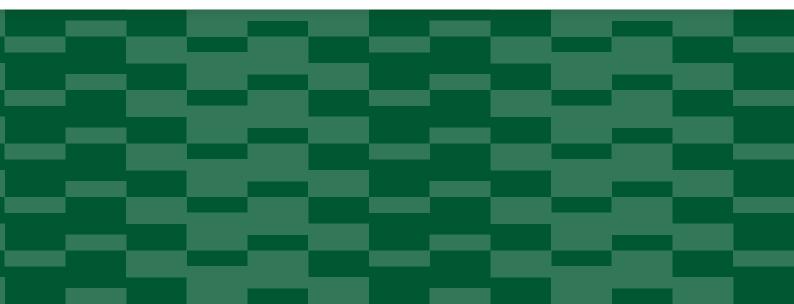# ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION (ARACIS)

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews the compliance of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Agenţia Română pentru Asigurarea Calităţii în Învăţământul Superior) (ARACIS, the Agency) with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). It is based on an ENQA-coordinated external review with a site visit to Bucharest undertaken between 4 and 7 March 2018. This is the third external review of ARACIS by ENQA, the previous reviews being in 2009 and 2013. ARACIS has been a full member of ENQA and has been listed on the European Quality Assurance Register since 2009.[1]

The governance of ARACIS is headed by its Council. This consists of 21 members including two students, a representative of Romanian employers, and a representative of the trade-unions in higher education. Of the remaining members five (including the President of the Council) form the Executive Board of ARACIS with the President of the Council fulfilling the role of Chief Executive. This dual role is permitted by the legal framework under which ARACIS operates; nonetheless, that the President of the Council acts as the Chief Executive of ARACIS compromises the ability of the Council to hold the Executive Board to account for its management and leadership of the Agency. The report of the 2013 ENQA review of ARACIS commented on the predominance of males at senior levels in the governance and management of ARACIS and recommended action to deal with this gender imbalance.[2] In 2018 this continues to be a problem.

Since 2013, ARACIS has continued to carry out a substantial programme of reviews and accreditations across Romania at institutional level, for undergraduate programmes and more recently for Masters' programmes by subject domain. There is also the prospect that ARACIS will undertake reviews of doctoral programmes, again by subject domain. In 2015, when the revised ESG were approved, ARACIS had already set up an internal working group to revise its existing review methods and procedures which dated from 2007. After 2015, ARACIS extended the focus of the same working group to ensure the continuing compliance of ARACIS with the new version of the ESG.[3] The role of this working group was later further extended to planning the self-assessment for this review.[4] ARACIS has taken care to map its own procedures and arrangements against the requirements of the revised ESG. The review panel cannot be sure, however, to what extent the reviews that ARACIS undertakes test whether institutions have adopted learning outcomes.

Since 2013 ARACIS has tendered for and undertaken a programme of pilot reviews of law programmes for the Moldovan Government. In all these activities (other than with respect to learning outcomes) there is clear evidence of attention to the ESG. Likewise, ARACIS has been an active contributor to the wider work of ENQA and has participated in several of its technically demanding activities. Within Romania, ARACIS has continued to publish issues of its 'Quality Barometers': thematic reviews of higher education, which the 2013 ENQA report highlighted then as good practice.

The Council, Executive Board and staff of ARACIS work diligently each year to carry out a large number of higher education reviews and other activities. The arrangements ARACIS has made for Permanent Specialty Commissions to act as coordinators for review activities in particular subject domains,

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[1] ARACIS SAR, p.2; ARACIS self-evaluation, 2013
[2] E.g, p.13
[3] SAR, pp.31-2
[4] SAR p.3

together with the work of its two Departments for Accreditation, and for Evaluation, enable ARACIS to supervise and manage its review work effectively. There is evidence that ARACIS manages its financial and other resources prudently, to keep its expenditure in step with the fees it charges higher education institutions for its review activities, and changes in legislation. At present, however, ARACIS does not have a strategic plan that spans several years; that describes why and how it intends to become more efficient and effective in supporting Romanian higher education and sets targets against which the Council (and others) can assess the progress of ARACIS and the performance of its CEO and Executive Board. ARACIS should now develop such a strategic plan.

The 2013 report recommended that ARACIS take steps to make all the reports it publishes machine-readable so that they can be indexed by internet search engines. This would make their contents more accessible to students and others seeking information about Romania's higher education. By 2018 ARACIS had made little progress towards meeting this recommendation.

The review panel finds ARACIS to be Fully Compliant with ESG 2.3; 2.4; 2.5; 2.7; ESG 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; and 3.7. It finds ARACIS to be Substantially Compliant with ESG 2.1; 2.2; and ESG 3.5; and 3.6. The panel finds ARACIS to be Partially Compliant with ESG 3.1 and 2.6.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*Agenţia Română pentru Asigurarea Calităţii în Învăţământul Superior*) (ARACIS) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted from December 2017 to April 2018.

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015. As this was the third ENQA review of ARACIS, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress from the previous review. The *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of the agencies; the panel has therefore adopted this developmental approach.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2013 REVIEW

The previous ENQA coordinated review took place in 2013. With respect to the ESG (2005) it found ARACIS:

- <u>fully compliant</u> with ESG 2.1 (use of internal quality assurance procedures); 2.2 (development of external quality assurance processes); 2.4 (processes fit for purpose); 2.5 (reporting); 2.6 (follow-up procedures); 2.7 (periodic reviews); 2.8 (system-wide analysis); 3.1 and 3.3 (use of external quality assurance in higher education and activities); and with ESG 3.2 (official status); 3.4 (resources); 3.5 (mission statement); 3.6 (independence); 3.7 (external quality assurance criteria and processes); 3.8 (accountability procedures); ENQA Criterion 8 (consistency of judgements, appeal system and contributions to ENQA aims);
- <u>substantially compliant</u> with ESG 2.3 (criteria for decisions).

The 2013 review commended ARACIS:

- for its diligence in organising and conducting a very substantial programme of evaluations;
- for publishing its 'Quality Barometer' Reports to provide 'valuable insights into the state of higher education in Romania'.

The 2013 review also made 20 recommendations to ARACIS for enhancements. These were chiefly around the need for greater involvement of students in review activities, and for students and other stakeholders to participate in the governance of ARACIS, together with the need for greater transparency on the part of ARACIS in communicating the findings of its reviews and other work to non-specialist audiences through its website and other means. The President of the ENQA Board highlighted these recommendations when writing to ARACIS later in 2013 to confirm the renewal of

its full membership of ENQA and to advise that when the next external review took place it would be expected to give special attention to these matters. [5]

In September 2015 ARACIS submitted a follow-up report to ENQA on progress since the 2013 review. In November 2015, ENQA requested further information from ARACIS about the involvement of students in its quality reviews. In response, ARACIS informed ENQA that it would be able to achieve full implementation of Standard 2.4 of the ESG (2015) (conduct of quality assurance by external experts including student members) by 2018.

ARACIS has been registered on EQAR since 2009. At the time the 2013 ENQA review took place, ARACIS was about to propose a new evaluation methodology for Masters Domains to Romania's Ministry of Education. When its registration was renewed by EQAR in 2014, ARACIS was informed by EQAR that when the revised evaluation methodology was officially approved it would need to submit a Substantive Change Report to EQAR's Register Committee. This Report was submitted in March 2016 and after requesting and receiving further clarification was accepted by the Register Committee in 2016. In its acceptance letter, the Register Committee stated that 'the next external review of ARACIS (for renewal of registration on EQAR) should pay due attention to the way in which the relevant criteria and procedures are published (see standards 2.3 and 2.5, ESG 2015), next to the remaining standards of the ESG 2015'.[6]

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2018 external review of ARACIS was conducted by ENQA in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of ARACIS was appointed by ENQA and comprised the following members:

- **David Cairns** (Chair), Independent Higher Education and Quality Assurance consultant, Director of Quality Assurance Research for Higher Education Ltd; Director of Academic Audit Associates Ltd, UK (Quality assurance professional, ENQA nominee)
- **Agnes Leinweber** (Secretary), Programme Manager, German Accreditation Council (GAC), Germany (Quality assurance professional, ENQA nominee)
- **Hannele Niemi**, Professor, Research Director, University of Helsinki, Finland (Academic, EUA nominee)
- **Simona Dimovska**, Master student at Iustinianus Primus Law Faculty, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, Macedonia (Student, ESU nominee)

For the ENQA Secretariat, Agnè Grajauskienė coordinated the work of the review panel and attended the site visit in support of the panel and as an observer for ENQA.

The review panel was constituted by ENQA in December 2017. Panel members received the self-assessment report (SAR) from ARACIS via ENQA in January 2018 and began to analyse its contents against the ESG. In February 2018 the ENQA coordinator facilitated a helpful web-based teleconference. This enabled the panel to discuss the SAR and practical aspects of the review including the schedule of meetings for the site visit, and to request additional information. Throughout the

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[5] Renewal of ARACIS full membership in ENQA, 28 November 2013, http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Letter-ENQA-to-ARACIS_281113.pdf 15.05.2018

[6] See Annex 9.2 EQAR documents – SAR

period before the site visit the panel secretary had regular contacts with the respective review coordinators for ENQA and ARACIS. Additional information continued to be provided by ARACIS until the beginning of the site visit. This information is listed in an Annex 1 to this report (p.50, below).

Self-assessment report

The self-assessment report provided by ARACIS to support the review was a 64-page document with 10 Annexes. A section of the SAR described in some detail how a working group had been convened to draw the SAR, led by senior members of ARACIS and with the participation of members of the Council and external stakeholders.[7] The final version was provided in January 2018, after pre-screening by the review coordinator for the ENQA Secretariat.

The review team found the SAR to be descriptive rather than analytical, with the exception of a concise analysis of Strengths Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) at the end of the document.

Site visit

The site visit took place from 4 to 7 March. The details of the schedule of meetings can be found at Annex 2. In the course of the visit the review panel met the President of ARACIS, members of its Council and Executive Board, the team that had contributed to drafting the self-assessment report, members of Permanent Specialty Commissions, members of the staff of ARACIS, representatives of the Ministry of National Education, higher education institutions and external stakeholders including students and representatives of employers and trades unions. The panel wishes to express its thanks to all those who gave up their time to meet it and to help it to enhance its understanding of ARACIS and the contexts within which it operates.

The panel submitted the enclosed report with a unanimous vote on 26.08.2018, taking the statement by ARACIS from 12.06.2018 into account.

This report is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) from May 2015. Throughout the review the panel took care to refer to the November 2017 version of the EQAR Register Committee, RC/12.1 'Use and the Interpretation of the ESG'.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the 1990s the Higher Education System of Romania expanded rapidly at the same time that the birth rate of its citizens began to decline. This has reduced the school age population in Romania and the number of post-secondary students eligible to enter higher education. This demographic decline contributed to a reduction in the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) operating in Romania in 2014 from 59 in the state sector in 2000, to 56 in 2014 and the number of privately operated HEIs from 67 in 2000 to 47 in 2014.[8]

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[7] SAR, pp. 3 - 4
[8] Quality Barometer 2016 Part II, p. 46 http://www.aracis.ro/en/publications/aracis-publications/

The structure of higher education in Romania is prescribed by the Law of National Education (the Law)[9] and the Romanian higher education system is coordinated by the Ministry of National Education. According to the Law, the Romanian higher education system includes all accredited higher education institutions operating in the state: universities, academies, institutes, higher education schools and others. Higher education institutions (HEIs) may be public or private, or confessional institutions.

According to the SAR, in the academic year 2016-2017, there were 101 accredited HEIs in Romania of which 55 were in the state sector and 46 were in the private sector. Since the Bologna process was launched in 1999, Romania has been an active participant and has adapted its national arrangements for higher education to meet the requirements of the European Higher Education Area.

Since the 2005-2006 academic year, the Romanian Higher Education System has had the following structure:

- first cycle, Bachelor's degree ('Licență' - Level 6 of the European Qualifications Framework) – 3 study years (180 ECTS) or 4 study years (240 ECTS) for some programmes, such as Law and Engineering; EU regulated professions, with long programmes (Level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework) of 5 study years (300 ECTS) or 6 study years (360 ECTS) such as: Medicine, Pharmaceutical, Dental, Veterinary or Architecture study programs;
- second cycle, Master's degree ('Masterat' - Level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework) – up to 2 study years (60 – 120 ECTS);
- third cycle, Doctoral studies ('Doctorat' - Level 8 of the European Qualifications Framework) – 3 study years. For the third cycle, the ECTS workload is decided by the universities. Full-time or part-time doctoral studies correspond to three years' work time.[10]

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Rapid and unchecked expansion in the number of higher education institutions in Romania in the 1990s highlighted the need for the Government to regulate and control HEIs issuing degrees and diplomas. Romania's first accreditation law in higher education was adopted in 1993.[11] Among other reforms, this law created the forerunner of ARACIS, the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) which undertook programme and institutional evaluations from 1993 until 2006 when it was formally succeeded by ARACIS.[12]

In discharging its responsibilities, ARACIS collaborates with two other agencies in Romania: the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), which oversees the quality assurance of primary and secondary education, and the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC).[13] The latter is a public institution with legal personality that is coordinated by the Ministry of National Education and is responsible for developing and managing Romania's National Qualifications Framework; its National Register of Qualifications; and Romania's National Register of providers of vocational training for adults. The ANC is also responsible for ensuring the compatibility of nationally established qualifications with those of other qualifications systems at European and international

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9   SAR Annex 1 part 2
10   SAR p. 5
11   Quality Barometer 2016, Part IV, p. 259
12   http://www.aracis.ro/en/aracis/history/ 21.03.2018
13   SAR p. 7

level, and for developing proposals to the Ministry of National Education for regulatory actions relating to the qualifications system and human resource development, including the training of adults.[14]

ARACIS

ARACIS was founded in 2005 by Government Emergency Ordinance, approved by the Parliament as Law in 2006; it is now the sole national Agency for quality assurance in higher education in Romania.[15]

ARACIS'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

ARACIS is led by a Council of 21 members, of whom 17 are academics, representing different study domains; two are students' representatives (from two of the three Romanian Students' Federations (Unions) recognised at national level, reconfirmed yearly at the beginning of each academic year); one is a representative of Romanian employers' federations; and one is a representative of the trades-union with the highest number of members in higher education.

In accordance with the Law, the Council chooses five of its members to form the Executive Board of ARACIS, which oversees and manages the day-to-day management of the Agency's work. Two of the five members of the Executive Board – the President of the Council and the Vice-President – are elected by their peers via secret ballot. The other three members of the Board are appointed by the President: two serve as Directors of Departments (Accreditation and External Quality Evaluation, respectively) and the third serves as the Secretary General of ARACIS.[16]

The Council has two main committees/commissions, which are alternatively referred to as 'departments': these are the Accreditation Department and the Department of External Evaluation of Quality (see below). Each of these consists of eight Council members who are responsible to their fellow Council members for overseeing and discussing all the reports of external quality assurance activities ARACIS undertakes in their particular area. All reports of the quality assurance activities that ARACIS undertakes are presented to its Council for formal approval. In the case of the outcomes of reviews for accreditations the Council of ARACIS makes recommendations to the Ministry of National Education and it makes the decisions.

To advise it on academic matters ARACIS has established 15 'Permanent Specialty Commissions' as follows:

- C1: Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences
- C2: Humanist Sciences and Theology
- C3: Judicial Sciences
- C4: Social and Political Sciences
- C5: Administrative and Educational Sciences and Psychology
- C6: Economic Sciences I
- C7: Economic Sciences II
- C8: Arts, Architecture, Town Planning, Physical Education and Sport
- C9: Agricultural and Forest Sciences and Veterinary Medicine
- C10: Engineering Sciences I
- C11: Engineering Sciences II

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[14]   https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/nss/national-support-services-romania 21.03.2018.
[15]   SAR p. 2
[16]   SAR p. 6)

- C12: Health
- C13: Distance learning
- C14: Institutional Evaluation for Managerial and Financial Activities Commission
- C15: Employers register

Each Permanent Specialty Commission comprises between 7 and 13 members and must include at least one student member. The work of each Permanent Specialty Commission is led by its Chair and supported by its Secretary. One third of the membership of each Permanent Specialty Commission retires after three years.[17] The primary responsibility of each Permanent Specialty Commission is to ensure that judgements in reports are made accurately and consistently between evaluation panels and the institutions they report on.

Each Permanent Specialty Commission receives and considers all the reports and proposed conclusions of the evaluation panels that operate in its particular educational domain.

Reports of the evaluation of study programmes and their conclusions are considered by the Permanent Specialty Commissions and then by the Accreditation Department. [18] The Accreditation Department is also responsible for appointing panels of evaluators for the procedures for the provisional authorisation and accreditation of study programmes and to verify their reports.[19] For institutional evaluations the Quality External Evaluation Department appoints evaluators to particular panels and verifies the contents of their reports.

In addition to the Department of External Evaluation of Quality and the Accreditation Department, ARACIS has also established a Consultative Commission (sometimes referred to as the 'Consultative and Audit Commission'). The membership of this Commission comprises 'reputed academics, many of them former Council or Commissions members, with experience in quality assurance.' One member of this Commission takes part in each institutional evaluation to ensure that agreed procedures are followed and that the panel of evaluators follows the rules and codes of conduct published by ARACIS.[20]

ARACIS'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

The core activities of ARACIS are:

- Programme External Evaluation/Accreditation;
- Institutional External Evaluation/Accreditation;
- Evaluation of Master Study Domains.

Programme External Evaluation/Accreditation

For a higher education institution that wishes to offer a new programme (whether a Licenta or Masters programme) the first step is to get provisional authorization to operate the programme, in advance, from the Ministry of National Education (advised by ARACIS). This requires the institution to submit a self-evaluation that is analysed by ARACIS. If the results of the analysis by ARACIS are positive and the Ministry agrees to grant provisional authorization, the HEI may then recruit and admit students in the following year, subject to specified follow-up procedures carried out by ARACIS. After two years of

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[17] Annex 7.1
[18] SAR p.33
[19] SAR p.35
[20] SAR p.35

provisional authorisation, ARACIS conducts an external evaluation which is the basis for the formal accreditation of the programme. Accreditation is granted by the Ministry of National Education;[21] it is valid for five years and must be renewed regularly. As the requirements of the Methodology and the Guide are the same for the provisional authorisation and for the evaluation of study programmes, they are dealt with together in this report.

Institutional External Evaluation/ Accreditation

When it is proposed to establish a new higher education institution, an application must first be made for provisional authorisation before it can commence operations together with an application for the provisional authorisation of a minimum number of study programmes.[22] When an application is made for institutional authorisation, ARACIS is required by law to undertake an evaluation of its suitability as a prior step towards initial institutional accreditation and periodically to refresh the accreditation status of public and private higher education institutions. For both initial and periodic institutional evaluations the procedure provides for the concurrent evaluation of 20 per cent of the study programmes that the institution offers.[23] Institutional accreditations are valid for five years after which an evaluation for the purposes of reaccreditation must be completed.[24]

Evaluation of Master Study Domains

The Council of ARACIS approved the 'Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees' in October 2017. The procedure for the accreditation of Master Study domains has been designed to allow a higher education institution that has been accredited to offer master domains some flexibility in introducing new Masters' programmes. The evaluation procedure is to be fully applied for the first time in 2018.[25] Until this new process was formally approved, the evaluation of Master study programmes followed specified procedures that were similar to those for the external evaluation/accreditation of undergraduate/Licenta study programmes. This procedure remains available for the evaluation of individual Master study programmes.

According to ARACIS, between 2014 and October 2017 it carried out almost 2,400 external quality evaluation activities, of which almost 1,800 were undergraduate level 'Licenta' programmes and more than 500 were Master study programs or 'Masterat'. In the same period ARACIS conducted more than 70 institutional evaluations.[26]

Since 2013, the Ministry of National Education has confirmed that ARACIS is to be responsible for conducting external evaluations/accreditations of the third cycle of university studies (doctoral), according to the Law of National Education no.1/2011. This activity has not yet started, due to legislative delays. Doctoral evaluations have therefore not been considered in the terms of reference of the present external review. [27]

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[21] Methodology 2018 p. 53
[22] ARACIS Activity Report 2015, 2.1, p.17
[23] These samples are programme reviews which were also discussed in the Permanent Specialty Commission and the Accreditation Department. SAR p. 33
[24] Methodology 2018, p. 44
[25] SAR p.60
[26] SAR p.8
[27] SAR p.7

Evaluations of joint programmes

The Law allows for institutions to offer transnational joint-programmes/double degrees that are based on mutual cooperation agreements between institutions, provided that the national law in the country of the partner institution of the Romanian university does not forbid them. At the present ARACIS confirmed that it does not carry out evaluations of programmes that are jointly offered between two or more programmes.

Awarding the EUR-ACE® Label

ARACIS participates in the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE) and is certified to conduct evaluations for the EUR-ACE® Label. The Label can be awarded following a successful evaluation by ARACIS of an engineering first Cycle programme. Such evaluations are voluntary and undertaken at the request of the higher education institution providing the programme. After undertaking the requested evaluation, ARACIS sends a report to ENAEE for its consideration and (if successful), the approval of the programme for inclusion in the database of engineering programs that hold the EUR-ACE® Label.[28]

In 2017-18 ARACIS was undertaking an external evaluation by ENAEE, for the purpose of checking and reconfirming the capacity of ARACIS to undertake evaluations for the award or renewal of the EUR-ACE® Label. For this purpose, ENAEE made a first site visit to Bucharest in November 2017, with the second site visit due to take place in 2018.[29]

International activities

ARACIS has been a full member of ENQA and on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) since 2009. ARACIS is also member of other international networks and organizations of agencies for quality assurance in higher education, including the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA); the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE); and the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE).[30] Within the wider Bologna Process, and at the request of the Ministry of National Education and with its support, ARACIS representatives have participated as members of the Romanian delegation in a series of Bologna Follow-up Group meetings.

In its SAR ARACIS described how it had participated in several EU funded quality assurance projects. The following description will only focus on two as examples: QUALITAS and TARGET.

In the QUALITAS project ('Development and consolidation of quality culture in Romanian higher education system', 2007-2013), ARACIS had worked in partnership with CEENQA which facilitated the selection of foreign evaluators to take part in the external institutional evaluation of 20 Romanian universities. For this project ARACIS developed proposals for new indicators for the quality evaluation and compatibility at system level; undertook a system analysis of quality in the Romanian higher education system and the perceptions of stakeholders and beneficiaries of activities by ARACIS; and published several brochures, including one about quality assurance review in higher education.[31]

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[28] SAR p.39
[29] SAR p.13
[30] SAR p.13
[31] SAR p.14

In 2017 ARACIS became a partner in the EU Horizon 2020 funded project TARGET: 'Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation' (2017-2021). This project aims to initiate institutional change in seven gender equality innovating institutions (GEIIs) in the Mediterranean basin. It is coordinated by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) - Austria. One of the aims of TARGET is to establish a community of practice to effect institutional transformation. The deadline for completion of the project is 2021.[32]

Evaluation of law study programmes in Moldova

In 2014, following a public tender process the Ministry of Education of Republic of Moldova entered into a contract with ARACIS for it to conduct a pilot evaluation of Law Study programmes in 17 of the 19 Moldovan universities offering the subject. The contract required ARACIS to design a programme evaluation methodology that was consistent with Moldovan legislation and regulations and the ESG and to manage the evaluations overall.

ARACIS's FUNDING

ARACIS is chiefly financed through the fees it charges for undertaking external quality assurance activities in Romania. It also benefits from project-based funding by the Romanian state and the EU. At the time of the review, financial data was only available for 2016 and the first half of 2017 for which ARACIS had a surplus of income over expenditure (in Romanian lei) of 3,217,317.[33] In 2017, the Romanian Government changed the basis on which it taxed employees for which ARACIS had made appropriate provision.

Staffing

In 2017, nine persons worked for ARACIS in its offices as professional staff and 24 worked as technical staff (See also ESG 3.5, below).[34] In addition, ARACIS has on its register more than 1,300 evaluators.[35] The head office of ARACIS is located at the premises of a university in Bucharest. Within its offices each work space is equipped with furniture, computer systems, network and telephone connections.

Project QAFIN

At the time of this review ARACIS was at the beginning of its participation in a new project: 'QAFIN'. The full title of the QAFIN project is 'Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating quality standards'. The project is coordinated by Romania's Ministry of National Education and co-financed by the European Social Fund, through the Operational Programme 'Administrative Capacity' 2014-2020, and involves World Bank experts. The project has several aims. One is to implement evidence-based public policies for financing of higher education institutions, through enhancing higher education regulations for external quality assurance and ranking higher education institutions. At the same time, the QAFIN project aims to improve the administrative capacity of the Ministry of National Education and of ARACIS, by adapting their structures and optimizing the processes they employ, training staff, improving public consultation mechanisms and 'by applying European best practices'.[36]

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[32] SAR p.62.
[33] SAR p.22.
[34] SAR p.20.
[35] SAR p.20
[36] SAR p.60.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ARACIS WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

> Standard:
>
> Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

Note. The present ESG 2015 Standard 3.1 contains elements of the former ESG 2005 Standards 3.1 ('Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education'), 3.3 ('Activities') and 3.5. ('Mission Statement').

2013 review recommendation

The Review Panel recommends for its future evaluation methodology that ARACIS should:

- formally establish a "stakeholders advisory committee" to advise the Council of ARACIS on how to ensure that its valuable work is better known to stakeholders and how to respond to the needs of stakeholders for information about higher education and higher education institutions in Romania (and further afield) (report p. 13).

Evidence

Mission and Vision

ARACIS publishes its mission statement on its website as follows:

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

- testing, according to quality standards, the capacity of education providing organizations 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 to the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation strategies and policies of permanently improving higher education quality, in close correlation with pre-university education.'[37]

Activities

The way in which ARACIS conducts evaluations of study programmes and institutions is dictated by the requirements of the officially approved 'Methodology for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference, and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education' (the Methodology).[38] This document includes objectives, criteria for judgements and the procedures to be followed. For the evaluation of study programmes and the institutional evaluations ARACIS has also developed separate 'Guides', which are published online.[39]

Following the adoption of the revised version of ESG in 2015 by the Ministers of the European Higher Education Area, the Methodology followed by ARACIS was updated in 2016, to comply with the new ESG. A new version of the Methodology followed by ARACIS was approved by the Ministry in January 2018 and has been published by the Agency on its website. [40] From June 2018 the Methodology approved in January 2018 will provide the basis for all external evaluations[41]. The procedures and criteria for the evaluation of Master Study Domains are also published online[42].

For testing and certifying the compliance of engineering programmes that have applied for the EUR-ACE® Label, ARACIS has a separate methodology, which includes criteria and regulations for the procedure which is published on its website in Romanian and English[43]. The pilot evaluation of Law programmes in Moldova broadly followed the ARACIS Methodology, with adaptations to cater for the requirements of Moldova[44]. It was shared with each institution participating in the pilot evaluations at the beginning of the process and explained in several workshops offered by ARACIS in Moldova. For the most part, documents cited in the SAR were available in English translations.

Involvement of stakeholders

ARACIS involves stakeholders on different level of its work. There are two student members of the Council, an employers' representative and one representative of the leading trades union in the higher education sector in Romania. The Permanent Specialty Commissions each include student members and the panels that evaluate study programmes include employers' representatives. Employers' representatives are involved in all evaluations of study programmes for the award of the EUR-ACE® Label.

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[37] See http://www.aracis.ro/en/aracis/mission/ 06.02.2018
[38] SAR Annex 2.1.
[39] Evaluation of study programmes: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/Part_I_-_STUDY_PROGRAMMES_ACCREDITATION.pdf. For institutional evaluation, see http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/PARTII_INSTITUTIONAL_ACCREDITATION_EXTERNAL_EVALUATION.pdf 09.02.2018
[40] http://www.aracis.ro/nc/en/aracis/ 09.02.2018
[41] See "Clarifications on the implementation of ARACIS Methodology of the external evaluation at institutional level, university study programs and master study domains" at http://www.aracis.ro/nc/en/aracis/, 13.03.2018.
[42] See http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/2017/Guideline_for_periodic_external_evaluation_of_the_fields_of_study_for_the_Master_degrees.pdf
[43] See http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Proceduri/2017/ARACIS_ENAEE_Standards_and_guidelines_EN.pdf 08.02.2018
[44] SAR p.11

In December 2015 ARACIS established an 'Employers' Register' to replace its former 'Employers' Commission'. This was to enable ARACIS to follow the pattern set by the ESG 2015 and to maintain an approach towards the participation of employers' representatives in reviews and evaluations that was consistent with the role given to them in the EUR-ACE® methodology. Outside its evaluation activities and the membership of its Council, when ARACIS needs to consult with employers' representatives it tends to do so on an ad hoc basis. In future, when it evaluates programmes in the economics and healthcare study domains ARACIS plans to involve employers from those areas of activity[45].

With respect to its interactions with other stakeholders, the President of ARACIS regularly attends the National Rectors' Conference as an observer and from time to time is invited to make presentations.[46]

The report of the 2013 ENQA review made a recommendation at ESG Standard 2.5 which, following the revision of the ESG in 2015 belongs more properly with ESG 3.1. That:

- ARACIS should strengthen the existing links between the Chairs of the Permanent Commissions and the Council through creating a new advisory committee of Chairs of the Permanent Commissions (report p. 26).

In the SAR ARACIS explained that after considering this recommendation it had decided not to follow it in order to avoid additional bureaucracy. The SAR further explained that since individual Council members participate in meetings of each Permanent Specialty Commission as observers this provided a way of bringing the views of the Permanent Specialty Commissions to the attention of the Council and that the Chairs of the Permanent Specialty Commissions met regularly when there are training sessions for evaluators and at Council meetings.[47]

Analysis

Governance and management

The review panel discussed the governance and management of ARACIS with its President, Council and Executive Board and others throughout the site visit. With respect to the governance of ARACIS, the panel sought to establish to which body or person outside ARACIS its Council was accountable for its oversight of the Agency. The panel was told that because of the necessity to maintain its independence from outside pressures, the Council of ARACIS was in practice only accountable to itself.

It was clear to the review panel that within ARACIS the Executive Board was accountable for the management of the Agency to the Council and its President. Given that the President of the Council currently acts as the CEO for ARACIS; that the members of the Executive Board are elected by the Council from its own members, and that the President appoints the Directors of the two principal operational divisions of ARACIS (the Accreditation Department and the External Quality Evaluation Department), it seemed to the panel that the Council of ARACIS was intimately involved in the management and operations of ARACIS, to the point where it was difficult to see how the Council could demonstrate its capacity to exercise independent oversight of the work of the Agency. The panel therefore recommends that the respective responsibilities of the Council, the President, the Executive Board and the Secretary General should be more clearly drawn in the interests of transparency, accountability, and good governance; that ARACIS should separate the role of the President of the

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[45]   SAR p.47.
[46]   SAR p.16.
[47]   SAR p.51

Council from that of a Chief Executive Officer, and that the role of the Secretary-General as the Chief Operating Officer of ARACIS should be confirmed.

Vision, Mission, and Strategy

Throughout the review, including the site visit, it was clear to the review panel that the Law, as it has been progressively amended since 2006, was a constant point of reference for ARACIS, defining what activities the Agency was empowered to undertake but also setting boundaries on what improvements or changes it felt able to introduce, lest it be challenged in the courts. It was also clear to the panel that successfully managing the volume of reviews that is required left little time and space for ARACIS to contemplate how to work more effectively and efficiently (See also ESG 3.5, below).

In its conversations with the Council of ARACIS and others throughout the site visit, it seemed to the review panel that the Agency has established its credibility with the Ministry of National Education as a trusted adviser on higher education matters. It also seemed to the panel that ARACIS remained eager, as in 2013,[48] to move the quality assurance of higher education in Romania on from formulaic compliance-checking towards evidence- and assurance-led quality enhancement. ARACIS told the panel that its aim is for higher education institutions to take more responsibility for the quality assurance of their own provision and for the Agency to become an external auditor of institutions' quality assurance arrangements and outcomes. For this to happen, the panel thinks that it would be necessary for ARACIS to convey this vision to its stakeholders (foremost amongst them, the Ministry of National Education) together with a strategy for realising it, and for the Agency to propose demonstration projects to test the feasibility of moving to evidence- and assurance-led quality enhancement.

At present, ARACIS does not have a strategic plan that spans several years and does not appear to set targets for itself against which its Council and others can measure the Agency's performance . The review panel recommends as a matter of urgency that ARACIS should draw up a strategic plan for developing systematically its own actions and processes and informing stakeholders including the Ministry of National Education, higher education institutions, students, employers, and others, of its vision, priorities and expectations. Such a strategic plan should include targets against which ARACIS and its Council and others can measure its progress. The panel considers that the development of such a strategic plan should be a priority for ARACIS and that ENQA should ask to see a draft of such a plan not more than 12 months after this report is approved by the ENQA Board.

Reflecting on the progress ARACIS has made since 2005 – as recorded in the reports of successive ENQA reviews – and on its active participation in EU, ENQA, and other development projects, it seemed to the review panel that the good standing and maturity of ARACIS are now established and that this should enable it to work more confidently in leading developmental projects (for example, on evaluating doctoral programmes) with willing higher education institutions and other agencies as partners.

Stakeholders

As previously noted, ARACIS chose not to implement the recommendation in the 2013 review report that it should establish a 'stakeholders advisory committee', choosing eventually to provide limited opportunities for representatives of students and employers to sit on its Council, join the work of the

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[48]   2013 report p.13

Permanent Specialty Commissions and participate in evaluations. ARACIS has been slow to act on these recommendations of the 2013 report and, while some delay may have been caused by the need to amend the Law, the 2018 panel is not confident that ARACIS understands the need to involve stakeholders more fully in the work of the Council and the work of ARACIS. For example, the panel has concerns that, without a wider understanding of the term 'stakeholder' (see below) and the further involvement of stakeholders in the work of the Council and the Permanent Specialty Commissions, established members of ARACIS and evaluators may be tempted to dismiss the views of students and other stakeholders in evaluation activities. If that was to happen we think it could diminish the confidence of stakeholders in ARACIS.

Until now, ARACIS has tended to define the term 'stakeholder' narrowly, confining it to students, employers and trades union representatives. Against this, the review panel recommends a broader understanding of the term that would extend to the deliverers of compulsory education (including those advising students on future careers and higher education); the National Authority for Qualifications; ARACIP; leading research institutes and private higher education providers. The panel also recommends that if ARACIS cannot see its way to establishing a stakeholder's commission it should substantially increase the number of stakeholders' representatives on the Council.

Panel's recommendations

- The panel recommends that the respective responsibilities of the Council, the President, the Executive Board and the Secretary General should be more clearly drawn in the interests of transparency, accountability and good governance and that a Chief Executive Officer, separate from the President, should be appointed.

- The panel recommends that ARACIS should draw up a strategic plan setting out aims for its own development with targets against which its Council and external stakeholders can measure its progress. Such a strategic plan should also serve as a means of informing the Ministry of National Education, HEIs and all those who work with ARACIS of its priorities and expectations. The panel suggest to ENQA that after one year it asks to see a draft strategic plan from ARACIS for the next 5 years.

- To work on the shift from quality assurance as compliance to quality assurance for enhancement, ARACIS should seek the support of the Ministry for a partnership project led by ARACIS with the Ministry and the HEIs to give substance to what is at present an aspiration.

- The panel recommends that ARACIS should either implement the 2013 recommendation, for a stakeholders' committee/commission and embrace a more generous definition of stakeholder, or that it substantially increase the number of stakeholder representatives on its Council.

Panel's conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

Evidence

In 2018 the official status of ARACIS derives from Romanian legislation. ARACIS was initially established as a higher education quality assurance agency for Romania by Emergency Government Ordinance no. 75/2005, which was approved by the Romanian Parliament by Law. No 87/2006, with subsequent amendments and modifications. Collectively these enactments are referred to by ARACIS as 'the Law'.[49]

Analysis

The legal status of ARACIS fulfils the requirement of ESG Standard 3.2. The Agency is recognized by the Ministry of National Education in Romania. In the course of the site visit the review panel came to the view that ARACIS worked hard to keep the confidence of the Ministry of National Education, as seen in the Law of National Education no.1/2011 and in the decision of the Ministry to assign responsibility for evaluating doctoral domains to ARACIS.

Panel's conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

Evidence

As the SAR noted, the independence of ARACIS is stated in the Law: 'ARACIS is an autonomous public institution, of national interest, having legal personality) and its own budget of revenue and expenses'.[50] The Law confers on the Council of ARACIS powers to decide the location of the Agency's headquarters, its organizational structures and internal rules of operation. The SAR stated that neither the Ministry of National Education nor other third parties, such as the universities or other stakeholders may influence the organization, staffing, premises and judgements of ARACIS. Changes to the Law in 2013 'empowered' the Council of ARACIS 'to better match its number of staff positions to its evolving working load'.[51]

Following approval of its Methodology by the Ministry of National Education, ARACIS is the sole Romanian Agency authorised to carry out external evaluations of the quality of education provided by higher education institutions in Romania.[52]

Analysis

The review panel is confident that ARACIS is an independent Agency with its capacity to organise its affairs and make judgements independently enshrined in the Law. In its operations ARACIS is independent: for example in nominating evaluators, conducting reviews and drafting reports including findings and recommendations. While the final decision in accreditations is made by the Ministry of

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[49] SAR p.17 and Annex 1.1
[50] Law, Art. 16 (1); SAR, Annex 1.1.
[51] SAR, p.19
[52] SAR, pp.17-18.

National Education, the panel learned that the Ministry acts only on the advice of ARACIS and that if it disagrees with ARACIS it cannot change the advice it has been given but must refer the matter back to ARACIS to reconsider.

As reported in previous ENQA reviews, ARACIS has adopted a 'Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct' which includes a non-conflict of interest statement to which evaluators are required to subscribe (see ESG 3.6, p24). The review panel considers, however, that the care ARACIS takes to keep within what it is permitted to do by the Law, has come to limit it from introducing improvements in what it does for fear that it may be challenged in the law courts. The effect is that ARACIS regards what is not expressly permitted by the Law as forbidden. Such an approach inhibits ARACIS from taking a lead in working with higher education institutions (and the Government) to foster improvements in higher education in Romania .

Panel's conclusion: fully compliant

Panel's suggestions for further improvement

- that ARACIS should explore how to take a more proactive role within the scope of legal possibilities to foster improvements in higher education in Romania.

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

> Standard:
>
> Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

2013 review recommendation[53]

ARACIS should

- seek external funding to undertake system-wide analysis projects on Romanian higher education, including projects with students which will require the more active participation of students (report p. 31)
- take steps to make the 'Quality Barometer' publications more widely known (report p. 31)

Evidence

The SAR refers to two substantial research projects undertaken by ARACIS between 2014 and 2017. The first was conducted between December 2014 and October 2015 and took the form of a quantitative and qualitative sociological research project to assess stakeholders' perceptions of the policies and quality of Romanian higher education at the system level the findings of which were published as a Quality Barometer report in 2015[54]. The second research project was undertaken between January and April 2017 and is a survey of the opinions of university managers on the one hand and evaluators from the ARACIS National Register (of evaluators) on the other. The aim of the survey was twofold: first, to gather and analyse the views of the higher education institutions it evaluates on the quality of the work ARACIS undertakes; second, to gather and analyse the views of

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[53]   The recommendation was given regarding the former EGS Standard 2.8 System-wide analysis'
[54]   SAR, Annex 6.1 and www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/2017/Quality_Barometer_2016_EN.rar 13.03.2018

evaluators on the ARACIS National Register, on the role of the Agency in the future development of Romanian higher education.[55]

The 2018 version of the Methodology requires the Council of ARACIS to draft an annual 'synthetic report'[56] on quality and quality assurance in Romanian higher education. The report will also include comparative data or information from other countries from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and further afield. This synthetic report is to be submitted to the Ministry of National Education and published.[57]

The review panel noted that there were similar provisions for ARACIS to produce a synthetic report in earlier versions of the Methodology from 2016.[58]

Analysis

Neither of the above research projects as they were described in the SAR directly fits the rubric of Standard 3.4, or the accompanying Guidelines, in that they do not focus on analysing the findings of the reviews and evaluations that ARACIS undertakes to 'contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts'. Nonetheless, an examination of the Quality Barometer reports for 2009, 2010 and 2015 shows that the authors of those publications used ARACIS evaluation reports as one source of information in what are more wide-reaching and policy-focused studies. As it goes into its next period of development ARACIS may wish to consider conducting more tightly focused and systematic analyses of its evaluation reports (as required by the Methodology). This could help the Agency to assess whether there are common themes of successes and weaknesses between institutions that point to opportunities for sharing good practice and bringing about enhancements.

The review panel recognises the scale of the commitment ARACIS has made to gathering and presenting data on the higher education sector in Romania and that progress has been made since 2013 in disseminating the findings of the Quality Barometer reports. ARACIS has continued to bid successfully for external funding for its research activities and its efforts to disseminate their findings results, for example through workshops with higher education institutions.

Panel commendations

The panel acknowledges the sustained effort of ARACIS to raise external funding to continue the series of the Quality Barometer reports as a good source of information about the Romanian Higher Education System.

Panel's suggestions for further improvement

- ARACIS should comply with the requirements of the Methodology to produce annual 'synthetic' reports that bring together and analyse the outcomes of its evaluation and other reports in support of quality improvements and publicise its findings to its stakeholders.

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[55] SAR Annex 6.2 and http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/2017/Prezentare_EN/2017__Review_ Evaluation_of_the_quality_of_the_activity_of_ARACIS.pdf 13.03.2018
[56] That is, a report bringing together in a synthesis the various findings of evaluations
[57] Methodology 2018, p. 44.
[58] Methodology 2016 p. 48.

- ARACIS should take further steps to improve the dissemination of its research reports and other analyses to its stakeholders and other interested parties.

Panel's conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

> Standard:
>
> Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

Evidence

Human resources

At the time of the review there were 33 persons working in managerial technical and administrative positions for ARACIS. ARACIS also retains the services of more than 1,300 evaluators.

Of the 33 full-time persons employed by ARACIS, nine are classified as 'professional staff'. They support reviews and evaluations; receive applications from higher education institutions for external evaluation and manage the evaluation process overall. Their duties include attending site visits and assisting with writing reports and analyses. In addition to the 'professional staff' there is a further group of 24 persons employed to administer ARACIS and manage its day-to-day financial and legal affairs. In December 2016 ARACIS moved its offices to a new location, at the premises of the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest.

As ARACIS stated in its SAR, its website has been reorganized since 2013 and substantial work has been done to develop the English language portion of the site. It was anticipated that a new website would be developed for ARACIS as part of the work covered by the QAFIN project.[59]

Financial resources

In order to preserve its independence, ARACIS does not receive funding from the Government to meet the costs of its day-to-day operations such as office services and IT support. Its sources of income include: fees for evaluations; fees from contracts for specific projects with the Ministry; and fees from contracts with the EU and other state authorities such as those of Moldova, for example.

Fee levels for each evaluation activity are specified by the Government according to criteria that it defines such as study programme level and the number of students enrolled by the institution. They are supposed to compensate ARACIS for the costs of performing the external evaluations.

A second source of income for ARACIS is the contracts that it enters into with the Ministry of National Education from time to time to undertake specific activities, such as external evaluations of quality assurance at institutional level, contributions to follow-up activities, and so on.

Income from EU-funded projects comprises a third source of income for ARACIS (see above p. 12)[60]

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[59] SAR, p. 22-23. See also above, p.13
[60] SAR p.19-21.

	2016	2017
Income, of which	12.761.901	757.3235
- From EU non-refundable funding (EU projects)	2.032.793	53.617
Expenses	6.960.263	4.355.918
- From EU non-refundable funding (EU projects)	3.893	
Surplus or Loss	5.801.638	3.217.317
- From EU non-refundable funding (EU projects)	2.028.900	53.617

Extract from Table 9.1, SAR p. 22

Since 2013 ARACIS has been able to generate a financial surplus each year from its activities and accumulate modest reserves. This prudent approach to the conduct of its business has enabled ARACIS to have reserves, that will be required when the way Romanian personal taxation is organised changes shortly, which will increase staff costs for ARACIS[61].

Analysis

ARACIS seems to the review panel to have managed its finances and its day-to-day activities carefully. The panel considers that the resources available to ARACIS are sufficient for its day-to-day activities but they do not appear to enable it to upgrade its resources, so that investments that would enable it to work more productively have to wait for special funding that comes with strings attached, such as through the QAFIN project (p.13).

The review panel understands the necessity for ARACIS to maintain its independence from Government and others. The panel considers, however, that if ARACIS is to support Romania's higher education institutions to move from quality assurance as 'compliance checking' to quality assurance as the basis for quality enhancement it will need more resources, whether from the Government or from fees, to support enhancement activities and make data and information more readily available to stakeholders.

Panel's recommendations

- The panel urges ARACIS to discuss the present fees regime with higher education institutions and the Ministry with a view to ensuring that the level of fees it charges for its evaluations more realistically takes into account its operational costs and explore other ways to secure funding for its office services including information technology.

Panel's conclusion: substantially compliant

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[61]   The panel learned during the site visit.

ESG 3.6 **I**NTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

> Standard:
>
> Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

2013 review recommendation

Standard 3.6 was in the ESG 2005 part of Standard 3.8 'Accountability procedures'

ARACIS should:

- publish its 'Code of Professional Ethics in the Evaluation Activities for the Authorisation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in the Field of Higher Education in Romania' and its Quality Manual in easy-to-find locations on its web site forthwith and likewise publish the membership of its 'Permanent Commission' (report page 38-39).

Evidence

ARACIS has a published Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) procedure (in Romanian) on its website and provided a translation of this document for the review panel in English. The document is in the format prescribed by law in Romania and includes references to the ESG.[62] According to ARACIS, it is legally required to adopt and follow the legally prescribed procedures for IQA and cannot vary the procedures. Under its published IQA, ARACIS has defined individual quality assurance procedures for the following: 'Experts and Specialty Inspectors Accreditation and Quality Assurance Office' (five procedures); 'Public Relations, Registry, Archive and Secretariat Office' (four procedures); 'Human Resources' (five procedures); 'Legal Department' (two procedures); 'IT Department' (two procedures); 'Economic Division' (finance and accounts – eight procedures); 'Public Acquisitions Department' (one procedure); 'ARACIS – System procedures (three procedures). The procedures are available in printed form for members of staff.

The SAR reminded the review panel that in 2011 ARACIS had participated in the EU funded project 'ACADEMIS' in 2011 as a result of which it had improved the organisation of its review activities. The panel noted that this activity preceded the period of the current review (2013-18).[63] Since 2013, ARACIS has created a new department (with a single member of staff) to handle IQA procedures. Since 2017 the list of procedures described above is now being revised by this member of staff, working with the President of ARACIS.

Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct

As noted in the 2013 report ARACIS has adopted a 'Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct' for its activities. This was updated in early 2018 and is published on the ARACIS website in Romanian and English. It provides statements of the values, principles and rules of conduct that ARACIS expects all those undertaking external quality evaluations to treat as authoritative statements of its requirements for their conduct. Each evaluator who is invited to work for ARACIS is required to sign a declaration that they have read and will follow its Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct before undertaking an evaluation or other activity for the Agency. The Code also requires all those who subscribe to it to

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[62] See http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Informatii_publice/Organigrama/PO-25-ARACIS-_Asigurare_interna_a_calitatii.pdf. 09.02.2018

[63] SAR, p.23.

'report to ARACIS management if there is a conflict of interest or incompatibility between the position of the evaluator and other qualities arising from their activity'.

To enforce the provisions of its 'Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct' ARACIS has an Ethics Commission. This has five members: two of whom are nominated by the Council, one by the student members of the council, one by the employers' representative and one member is nominated from the staff of ARACIS.[64]

Analysis

The review panel recognises the work of ARACIS in introducing comprehensive IQA procedures and the recent recruitment of a new member of staff to be responsible for IQA in 2017. The Agency has introduced comprehensive IQA procedures and surveyed the views of its stakeholders (including higher education institutions) and evaluators (see ESG 2.4, p.33). The data and information that these activities are continuing to generate will provide ARACIS with a sound basis for reviewing and improving the effectiveness with which it works.

The review panel noted that the legal format required for the Agency's IQA required ARACIS to take a compliance approach that might lead ARACIS evaluators to think that this represented the form of quality assurance that they were required to apply. The panel encourages ARACIS to continue with its work to introduce IQA but to seek ways to express its quality assurance expectations for its evaluation and other academic-based activities in ways that recognize that the Agency itself is on a journey to an approach to quality assurance that leads to enhancement.

With the publication of the 'Code of Ethics and Rules of Procedure' ARACIS has now satisfied the 2013 recommendation. The panel considers that the Agency's 'Code of Ethics and Rules of Procedure' provides a good basis for ensuring the ethical conduct and independence of all persons involved in the work of ARACIS.

Internal quality assurance: the work of the Permanent Specialty Commissions

In the SAR ARACIS stated that one of the duties of a Permanent Specialty Commission was to analyse the reports produced by the evaluation panels in its subject domain to check for the consistency of evaluations, in effect performing a quality assurance check, and that the Council relies on the findings of the Permanent Specialty Commissions. The review panel therefore asked members of Permanent Specialty Commission how they worked to provide this assurance to the Council. It was told that when a Commission meets to review evaluation reports it is provided with a pile of paper copies of each report on the day it meets. Because it is not possible for each Commission member to read all the tabled reports in the time available the Commission is guided through the findings of each report by a member of the relevant evaluation panel. Not only is this mode of working inefficient but it prevents individual members of the Commission from making their own judgements on the findings of individual reports before conferring with their peers.

The panel recommends that ARACIS should find ways to distribute searchable digital copies of its evaluation reports to members of Permanent Specialty Commissions in advance of their meetings, so

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[64]   Code of Ethics, Art 27, 09.02.2018 http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-
    _Proceduri/2017/Code_of_ethics_and_rules_of_conduct_ARACIS_2017.pdf

that all members of the Commissions can review the reports individually and independently before deciding collectively how to respond to them and what advice to give the Council.

Panel's recommendations

- ARACIS should provide searchable digital copies of evaluation reports to the members of its Permanent Specialty Commissions and other committees in advance of meetings where such reports are discussed.

Panel's conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

> Standard:
>
> Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

Evidence

ARACIS was externally reviewed by ENQA in 2008 and 2013 and ARACIS was granted ENQA full membership in 2009, reconfirmed in 2013 for a further five years until October 2018.

EQAR

Based on the outcomes of the ENQA-coordinated review in 2009, and on its own evaluations, the EQAR Registration Committee approved inclusion of ARACIS in the Register in 2009. ARACIS applied for renewal of its registration in November 2013. Based on the ENQA review report and following its own analysis, the Register Committee of EQAR renewed the registration of ARACIS on EQAR until September 2018. Under the terms of the Law, ARACIS is required to apply for registration in EQAR.[65]

Analysis

As ARACIS regularly conformed its membership by ENQA and its inclusion in the EQAR the ESG Standard 3.7 is fulfilled.

Panel's conclusion: fully compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

> Standard:
>
> External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

Evidence

For its current Methodology and the new Methodology that will come into effect in June 2018, ARACIS provided a detailed mapping in the SAR to show how each had addressed the ESG Part 1 (see Annex 5, p.69). The mapping covers the evaluation of study programmes; institutional evaluations; the role

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[65]   SAR p.25.

of ARACIS in certifying compliance with the requirements of the ENAEE for awarding the EUR-ACE® Label; and the evaluation of law study programmes in Moldova. For the evaluation of study Programmes in Moldova ARACIS presented a further mapping to show how ESG Part 1 of ESG 2005 and 2015 had been addressed (see Annex 6, p.71).

The published Methodology for the accreditation of Master Study Domains contains information which criteria corresponds to which Standard of ESG Part 1[66].

Analysis

It is clear that in designing its evaluation procedures, including those for the Master Study Domains, ARACIS has given careful consideration to the Standards that form Part 1 of the ESG. In the 2013 report, ARACIS was stated to be keen 'to emphasise the importance of learning outcomes' in its engagements with the higher education sector in Romania and the Law prescribes the use of the learning outcomes approach to describe qualifications.[67] The current evaluation Methodology, treats the terms 'learning outcomes' and 'competences' as synonymous, as does the Methodology for the evaluation of Master Domains[68] and the new Methodology for Licenta that is to be introduced from June 2018.[69] The panel recommends that ARACIS now ceases to treat 'competences' and 'learning outcomes' as synonymous in each of its evaluation methods. At the same time the Agency should assist its evaluators and higher education institutions across Romania to adopt the learning outcomes approach and provide clear guidelines on what that requires for programme design and the assessment of students' work.

Overall the panel finds ARACIS Standards in line with the ESG Part 1, however there should be a closer alignment in practice with the focus on student-centeredness, learning outcomes and enhancement.

Panel's recommendations

-   ARACIS should cease to treat 'learning outcomes' and 'competences' as synonymous in its evaluation methods;

-   ARACIS should develop a manual to disseminate the concept of learning outcomes to its evaluators and to higher education institutions in Romania.

Panel's conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

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[66] See http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/2017/Guideline_for_periodic_external_evaluation_of_the_fields_of_study_for_the_Master_degrees.pdf , 19.03.2018.
[67] Law, Art 2(f)
[68] Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master degrees p.4, para 3.1
[69] 2013 report p.12

2013 review recommendation

In the ESG 2005 Standard 2.2 formed part of Standard 2.2 'Development of external quality assurance processes' and of Standard 2.4 'Processes fit for purpose'.

The 2013 panel made following recommendations:

- that ARACIS should plan to involve students fully as evaluators in programme evaluations (page 11) [70]
- consider the benefits for students and stakeholders for there to be a main report on each university and higher education institution with the possibility to report additionally on programme domains at each institution where relevant (report page 13)[71]
- continue its work to provide support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions to adopt an improvement focus to their work on quality assurance (report page 13)
- continue to improve gender representation at all levels of the work of ARACIS (report page 13)[72]
- take the opportunity presented by the introduction of the new evaluation methodology to arrange for students to be full members of evaluation panels at all levels and involve stakeholders and students in work of Permanent and Speciality Commissions as members (report page 13).

Evidence

In the Methodology that will come into effect in June 2018 for all ARACIS evaluations the purpose is:

- 'the analysis of the quality of the study programs offered by the higher education institutions and, where necessary, the support of the process of the elimination of education quality dysfunctions and deficiencies;
- 'support for the continuous improvement of the quality of education by disseminating best practices and encouraging experience exchange between HEIs which offer similar study programs.
- 'ensuring the process of providing effective and accessible information to the public with regard to the quality of the study programs, by publishing the institutions' self-evaluation reports'[73]

Stakeholder involvement in developing evaluation methodologies

In the SAR ARACIS described in detail how the 2006 version of the Methodology had been revised following the revision to the ESG in 2015 and in parallel with its own development. In the case of the 2018 Methodology as with the SAR, it stated that representatives of employers and students had been involved throughout its development.

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[70] Please see ESG Standard 2.4
[71] Please see ESG Standard 2.6
[72] Please see section "Additional observations".
[73] METHODOLOGY for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference and the list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Approved by Government Decision No.915/2007 Published in the Romanian Official Gazette No. 25/11.01.2018, p.49

The working group that had revised the 2006 Methodology had completed a tabular analysis of the Methodology with ESG 2015. This comprised a detailed grid showing the correspondence between ESG Part 1 and the Criteria, Standards and Performance Indicators used by ARACIS to undertake external evaluations of the quality of higher education programmes and institutions. This comparison enabled ARACIS to come to the conclusion the 2006 Methodology was broadly compatible with ESG 2015 and needed only minor adjustments.

After approval by its Council, ARACIS posted a proposal for the revised Methodology (in Romanian) on its web site in June 2017, for public debate, and sent a copy to the Ministry for its observations. According to the SAR, the consultation on the draft Methodology remained open for several months and attracted observations and proposals for amendments, including from students. ARACIS then finalised the revised Methodology for submission to and approval by the Ministry. The revised Methodology was then published by ARACIS on its website in Romanian.[74]

As part of the revision process for the 2018 Methodology, the SAR reported that ARACIS had conducted several training sessions for representatives from the internal quality assurance departments of universities and other higher education institutions in which it provided information on the ESG 2015, and the compatibility of its provisions with the procedures of the Agency, together with its proposals for new procedures.

The SAR also explained that the standards and performance indicators to be used in ARACIS evaluations for the EUR-ACE Label® for engineering study programmes had been developed in partnership with employers' representatives, and that the success of this activity had led ARACIS to adopt a similar approach when working to define Standards and performance indicators for use with other study fields.[75]

Analysis

In formal terms, the Romanian Government, advised by the Ministry of National Education, determines the purpose or purposes of the evaluation methodologies that ARACIS employs to assess study programmes and higher education institutions. In practice, evaluation methodologies are designed and developed by ARACIS for Government consideration and stakeholders have opportunities through representatives on the ARACIS Council and through wider public consultations to contribute their views and advice. As ARACIS has continued to develop its expertise and maturity, it appeared to the panel that in its work with the Ministry ARACIS has become a trusted adviser.

On the basis of the mappings that ARACIS has conducted of its methodologies against the ESG 2015, which the review panel has examined, it is confident that ARACIS has adequate methodologies and Standards for each of the quality assurance evaluation procedures it has undertaken and undertakes including those for the EUR-ACE® Label and the reviews it has undertaken in Moldova. Procedures such as those for the evaluation of study programmes and for institutional evaluation are fit for purpose as are the procedures the Agency operates outside the Methodology such as those for the award of the EUR-ACE® Label and the evaluation of law study programmes in Moldova.

During the site visit some members of ARACIS told the review panel that they considered their various methodologies to be more complex than necessary and wish to simplify them, and to give higher

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[74]   SAR, p. 32.
[75]   SAR, p. 33.

education institutions more responsibility for quality assuring their own provision. The panel welcomes this idea which would be in line with the wider and long-standing ambitions of ARACIS to begin to move its evaluation activities away from compliance-checking to a more enhancement led approach (see above, p. 17).

The review panel learned that the 2018 Methodology is to be superseded in 2019 by a new 'Methodology' as one outcome of the QAFIN project (see above, p.13) but that this could be coupled with institutional classification and programmes ranking which are likely to be contentious.

While the Government and ARACIS publish the costs to the Agency of undertaking evaluations[76] the review panel could find no analysis of the costs and work imposed on Romania's higher education institutions of the various evaluations and accreditations that the Law requires. It occurred to the panel that research to establish these costs would provide the basis for a valuable contribution to the Agency's Quality Barometer series.

Panel's commendations

The review panel is pleased to note that ARACIS has worked to address the recommendation from 2013, to provide support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions.

Panel's recommendations

- ARACIS should continue to take steps within its existing methodology to bring its practice into closer alignment with the focus in ESG 2015 on student-centeredness, learning outcomes and enhancement.

- ARACIS should undertake an analysis of the whole costs of the current Romanian higher education quality assurance system to ARACIS and to higher education institutions and other interested parties and the workload that the system imposes on them.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

Evidence

All external quality procedures of ARACIS follow the steps that are set out in the Methodology.[77] In general, the steps are:

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[76] Government Decision nr. 1731/2006; http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie_-_Proceduri/tarife_ARACIS.pdf
[77] See Methodology 2018 p. 47-62.

a) the drafting, by the provider or institution, of a quality self-evaluation report;

b) the external evaluation of quality;

c) the implementation of recommendations resulting from the self-evaluation and external evaluation, and the monitoring, by the Agency, together with the education institution and/or other entities, of their implementation.[78]

The external evaluation (stage b) is specified as follows:

- the analysis of the self-evaluation report in relation to the areas, criteria, standards and performance indicators mentioned in the Methodology;

- visiting the programme by a panel made-up of three-four evaluators, which also includes one or more students, for a duration of three-four days, so as to concretely assess the correspondence between the data, information and conclusions of the self-assessment, on the one hand, and the actual institutional reality, on the other hand; the findings of the visit are noted in an external evaluation report which is concretized in conclusions and recommendations; for institutional evaluations, with a view to assuring transparency to the process, student evaluators and the international evaluator draft a separate report, from the most important elements are taken and included in the joint report of the visiting panel;

- the completion of the recommendations regarding quality improvement, after being discussed with representatives of the institution and/or study programme, approved by the ARACIS Council, and the external evaluation report has been made public.

For the publication of reports please see ESG 2.6 (p.38 below).

The evaluation process ARACIS follows for certifying the fitness of an engineering programme to be considered for the award of the EUR-ACE ®Label follows the same steps as for the evaluation of a Licenta (undergraduate) engineering programme, with two exceptions: In addition to the standards of the ARACIS methodology the EANEE Standards are used, and the ARACIS Council judges at the end the evaluation whether to recommend to ENAEE that the programme has met the required standards.[79]

Concerning the pilot evaluations of law programmes in Moldova, ARACIS brought together its Methodology regulations proposed by the Ministry of Education of Moldova, before the Moldovan accreditation regulations were adopted by the Moldovan Parliament. The adjusted Methodology was communicated to each participating higher education institution and stakeholder in the evaluation process.

In Moldova, the pilot evaluations were organized in three stages. In the first stage ARACIS staff drafted the documents needed to support the pilot evaluations and visited Moldova to train academic and student evaluators from Moldova.

In the second stage there were visits to the programmes being evaluated by up to three academic evaluators and a student evaluator. Visits lasted two or three days. Finally, there was an analysis of

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[78] See also Methodology 2018 p. 41.
[79] SAR, p.10.

the reports from the pilot visits and that agreement of conclusions. The editing and quality assurance arrangements for the reports from the pilot evaluations followed normal ARACIS procedures.[80]

Follow up procedure

A year after the report of an institutional evaluation has been finalised, the institution is required to write to ARACIS and describe how it has responded to the observations and recommendations in the report. This is followed up by ARACIS three years after the review with short site visit by a member of staff.[81]

Where an institutional evaluation has expressed 'limited confidence' in the institution's quality assurance arrangements, ARACIS will return to the institution to undertake a mid-term evaluation. Where an institutional evaluation has expressed confidence in the institution's quality assurance arrangements, the institution's response to any recommendations in the report is assessed at the next institutional evaluation.

In 2015, the Council of ARACIS clarified its follow-up procedures for study programme evaluations. From that point, evaluation panels for study programmes were expected to offer relevant recommendations and the next evaluation panel was required to examine how the recommendations of the previous panel had been dealt with institution's response. Again from 2015, two years after completion of a programme evaluation, institutions were required to provide the relevant Permanent Specialty Commission with a brief report on how the recommendations of the evaluation panel had been addressed.[82]

When introducing its procedures for the evaluation of Master Study Domains, ARACIS provided that in the case of Masters evaluations that include recommendations, the relevant higher education institution is required to submit a report on how it has dealt with the recommendations within two years. Again, such follow-up reports are sent to the relevant Permanent Specialty Commission, to identify whether progress has been made, highlighting any measures still to be implemented, and setting a deadline for submitting a new follow-up report.[83]

Analysis

As shown, ARACIS implements all elements of QA procedures listed in ESG 2.4. The review panel suggests that as ARACIS develops its follow-up procedures, to maintain public confidence that recommendations in evaluation reports lead to positive changes, it should consider how to inform the public and stakeholders of the steps that institutions have taken to address the recommendations in its evaluation reports (See also ESG 3.5 and 2.6).

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

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[80] SAR, p. 34.
[81] SAR p.52.
[82] SAR p.53.
[83] Guideline for periodic external evaluation of the fields of study for the Master's degrees p. 12)

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

> Standard:
>
> External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

2013 review recommendation

In ESG 2005 this Standard was part of Standard 3.7, External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members. In ESG 2015 it has become a separate standard. The 2013 review panel concluded on ESG 2005 standard 3.7 'fully compliant'. No recommendations were given.

Concerning ESG 2.4 EQAR has 'flagged' the following to be considered in this review:

'ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts [ESG 2005: standard 3.7]

- It should receive attention whether ARACIS has further developed the participation of students in the expert groups for programme reviews.[84]

Evidence

ARACIS has separate criteria for the selection of Romanian academic evaluators[85], international academic evaluators[86] and student evaluators.[87] All evaluators for subject domains (programmes) are nominated by the Executive Board of the Council, based on a proposal by the Head of the relevant Permanent Specialty Commission.[88] Student evaluators are nominated by two of the three officially recognised Romanian Student Federations.[89]

Each evaluator is required to sign a declaration to abide by the ARACIS 'Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct' which includes provisions requiring evaluators to declare circumstances whether may be conflicts of interest (See ESG 3.6, p.24).

The SAR describes the composition of review panels, as follows[90]:

Evaluation of study programmes (also applies for evaluation panels certifying engineering programmes as eligible for the EUR-ACE® Label):

- a visit panel coordinator (and evaluator member of the Permanent Specialty Commission),
- 2-3 academic evaluators, one student evaluator,
- one employers' representative (mainly in awarding EUR-ACE-Label).[91]

For institutional evaluations the composition of panels is as follows:

- Mission Director (member of ARACIS Council);

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[84] This 'flagged issue' refers to a recommendation of the panel, given in ESG 2.4. In the ESG version from 2015 the involvement of students was mentioned in several Standards/Guidelines.
[85] SAR Annex 7.3.
[86] SAR Annex 7.4.
[87] SAR Annex 7.5.
[88] SAR Annex 7.3.
[89] SAR Annex 7.5.
[90] SAR pp. 35-36)
[91] SAR, p. 35-36.

- Mission Coordinator (member of the Institutional Commission for Managerial and Financial Activities[92]);
- two student evaluators;
- foreign evaluators (member of the National Register of ARACIS International Evaluators);
- Advisory Commission Expert (member of the Permanent Commission – Consultative and Audit);
- Institutional Commission evaluators (member of the Institutional Commission for Managerial and Financial Activities);
- Programme evaluators (members of the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators (NRE) in each of the subject domains to which the evaluated programmes are assigned);
- Technical Secretary (a member of ARACIS's professional staff)

Evaluation of Master Studies Domain:

- Visit panel president – a member of the relevant Permanent Specialty Commission;
- 1-3 evaluators from NRE, in the study domain to which the evaluated program is assigned;
- one master/doctoral student from the NRE-S, in the master study domain

To enable it to manage the process of recruiting evaluators, ARACIS has established different databases which together comprise the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators. There are separate registers for national (Romanian) and international academic evaluators; for students, and employers' representatives. For the Register of Romanian academics who are willing to undertake evaluations, individuals can be listed on the Register after completing an evaluation procedure, using an online facility.[93] International evaluators are able to apply to be listed on the ARACIS Register and take part in evaluations by sending ARACIS a detailed curriculum vitae. Each of the Registers referred to above is published on the ARACIS website.[94]

Members of ARACIS told the review panel that student evaluators who are nominated by two of the three Romanian student federations and selected by them for nomination to ARACIS are selected for evaluations after successfully completing training sessions recognised by ARACIS and organised by the student federations with support from ARACIS.[95]

Training for evaluators

ARACIS regularly offers training sessions for its evaluators: according to the SAR more than 600 persons (academic staff and students) had participated in such training sessions.[96] The 2013 ENQA report had recommended that ARACIS involve student evaluators more fully in its activities which the Agency has since done. The 2018 review panel therefore sought to understand how ARACIS had inducted, trained and supported the student evaluators it had recruited.

The review panel learned that ARACIS had found it necessary to train a significant number of student evaluators to compensate for the large number of students that graduate each year and leave the higher education system. Training sessions for student evaluators are regularly organised by each of the student federations in Romania (there are three) with support from ARACIS in the form of lectures,

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[92] One of the Permanent Specialty Commissions.
[93] SAR p.35
[94] http://www.aracis.ro/en/organisation/national-register-of-evaluators/
[95] SAR p.35
[96] SAR Annex 7.7.

practical activities and partial support for out-of-pocket expenses. According to the SAR, funding from EU programmes had enabled ARACIS to cover the full cost of training student evaluators in 2015.[97]

The review panel discussed the training ARACIS provides for student evaluators and for evaluators more generally with those it met during the site visit. It learned that the format followed for training sessions is lecture based and that there were few opportunities for learning through simulations and practical exercises. It was also told that there was considerable scepticism in some quarters about the efficacy of 'virtual' or 'online' training for evaluators.

Evaluators who met the review panel observed that some of their fellows favoured a checkbox approach to their review activities rather than one of peer-based evidence-led judgements. The panel was also told that some evaluation panels treated student members as supernumeraries and not as full partner-evaluators in the review exercise and that some evaluators were not attuned to the necessity for 'student centeredness' in higher education and what that required of tutors and of them as evaluators.

ARACIS offers online training sessions for evaluators. An overview with dates and topics of all training sessions from 2013-2017 was provided in the SAR.[98] Evaluators who are not Romanian nationals are provided before the mission with all documents regarding ARACIS procedures and are briefed before the mission by the Director of mission on their expected role in the panel and reporting procedure. Their obligations are specified in their Contract.[99]

In September 2017 the Council of ARACIS approved the inclusion of students on programme evaluation panels and student members had been included in the membership of three accreditation panels at the time of the site visit. Amendments to the Law in December 2017 provide the legal basis for the involvement of students as evaluators in programme evaluations to be undertaken in the 2018 Methodology.[100]

Analysis

In the 2013 review the inclusion of students as evaluators in panels undertaking programme evaluations was an important matter the significance of which was underlined by both ENQA and EQAR following the review. By the time of the present review, ARACIS had included student evaluators in the work of the Permanent Specialty Commissions but had only just begun to involve students as evaluators in programme evaluations. Consequently, at the time of the site visit for the present ENQA review, ARACIS had implemented the recommendation but had had little experience of how it worked in practice.

The panel considers that its Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct provides ARACIS with a useful declaratory statement of how it expects its evaluators to conduct themselves.

The review panel notes that ARACIS publishes Registers that record the appointment of academic, student, and international evaluators and welcomes the engagement of ARACIS to provide regularly training sessions for evaluators. Nevertheless, as it enhances its arrangements for training all its evaluators the panel recommends that it should adopt more participatory approaches and methods

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[97] SAR, p.24.
[98] Annex 7.7
[99] SAR p.35
[100] SAR p.46

that might include simulations and practical exercises based on case studies. Such practical exercise could also enable ARACIS to emphasise to all its evaluators what it expects of them including how to conduct themselves with other team members and with the staff of institutions. The panel discussed the online form of training for evaluators with ARACIS during the visit and was surprised to learn that the Agency had not evaluated its effectiveness. This would now be advisable.

Nonetheless, it should not be the case that an evaluator can attend a site visit having only undertaken 'virtual' training and having no actual or simulated experience of working as a member of an evaluation panel. The review panel suggests that it would be prudent for ARACIS to introduce some quality control measures that will enable it to check whether the training it provides for its evaluators is as effective as it believes it to be.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The inclusion of more practical exercises and simulations in the training sessions for the evaluators, including sessions to enable them to consider their roles and ARACIS's expectations of them.

- ARACIS should introduce quality control arrangements to check the effectiveness of the training it provides for its evaluators and should also check whether periodic practical training and simulations should be provided for all continuing evaluators as well as for those newly appointed.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

> Standard:
>
> Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

2013 review recommendation

Standard 2.5 was in ESG 2005 Standard 2.3 'Criteria for decisions'. The panel concluded 'substantially compliant with following recommendation:

The Review Panel recommends to ARACIS that it should

- ensure that as well as any additions that the Council approves to the criteria its evaluators are required to employ in making their judgements, that criteria required to meet the requirements of a professional body are referred to on the ARACIS web site (with a web link) and brought directly to the attention of those to whom the criteria will be applied (report page 16).

Evidence

ARACIS uses published criteria for all external quality assurance procedures. Concerning the provisional authorization to operate, the evaluation of study programmes and institutional evaluation the Methodology defines Standards, Standards of Reference, and Performance Indicators. While Standards define the minimum compulsory level, the Standard of Reference set up the optimum level.

The 'Performance Indicator should measure the level of accomplishment of a certain activity carried out by an education providing organization against a standard.[101]

In ARACIS's internal quality assurance arrangements, the Permanent Specialty Commissions are required to ensure the consistency with which external evaluations are performed by reviewing the reports produced by the panels of evaluators. The observations of the Permanent Specialty Commissions on programme evaluation reports, together with the reports themselves, are discussed in meetings of the Department of Accreditation; institutional evaluation reports are reviewed by the Department of External Quality Evaluation.[102]

The outcomes of ARACIS reviews and evaluations of applications by higher education institutions for provisional authorisation to operate, and for the provisional accreditation of study programmes, is a recommendation in the form of 'Advice' to the Ministry of National Education to enable it to make a formal decision. ARACIS may advise provisional authorisation to operate; accreditation; that accreditation be denied or, in the case of applications for the continuation of existing authorisation, that it should be maintained. When the Government has made its decision, it is published in the Official Gazette for Romania, including when its decision applies to regulated professions such as medicine and engineering.

For the award of the EUR-ACE® Label by ENAEE, ARACIS advises it whether to approve the application for the Label or not and whether approval should be accompanied by recommendations. The certificate confirming the award of the EUR-ACE® Label itself is delivered to the higher education institution by ARACIS on behalf of ENAEE.[103]

For the evaluations of law programmes that ARACIS undertook for the Government of Moldova as noted previously the procedure broadly followed ARACIS procedures for the evaluation of Licenta programmes then the general ARACIS procedure for analysis of the reports and approval. Description of the process can be found in the "Generalized report" which is published on the website.[104]

Analysis

The review panel finds that for each of the external quality assurance methods and activities that it undertakes ARACIS has published clear criteria that have been developed to be fit for the particular purpose for conducting the review. Internally, ARACIS relies on its Permanent Specialty Commissions and the Departments of Accreditation and External Quality Evaluation to provide the Council with assurance that the criteria for review have been consistently applied. The review panel would, however, draw attention to the workload of the Permanent Specialty Commissions and the weaknesses in their working practices described elsewhere in this report (See ESG 3.6).

Concerning the matter of the inclusion of criteria from professional bodies in the criteria used for programme evaluations, the review panel re-visited this matter with ARACIS during the site visit. It heard that professional bodies in Romania undertook their own reviews for relevant programmes (including those leading to regulated professions) and that there was no question of including criteria developed by professional bodies in ARACIS criteria though there might be some overlap. On the basis

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[101] Methodology 2018, pp. 14-15.
[102] SAR p.33.
[103] SAR p. 37.
[104] http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Evaluari/Rapoarte_site/Documente_Moldova/MEducation_RM_Generalized_Report_EN.pdf

of the explanations and assurances it received, the 2018 panel concluded that the difficulties with criteria for reviews that were highlighted in the 2013 report had arisen from misunderstandings on the part of the 2013 panel.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

> Standard:
>
> Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

2013 review recommendation

- (1) for its new evaluation methodology ARACIS should broaden its view of the intended readership of its reports at programme and institutional levels to embrace potential students and employers of Romanian graduates (report page 24)

- (2) ARACIS should develop shorter and [more] clearly written reports in accessible language specifically for potential students and employers of Romanian graduates (report page 24)

- (3) ARACIS should undertake a research exercise to identify the information that students and employers need to draw on to identify programmes and institutions when making choices, and consider the possibility for institutional evaluations of issuing a main report with the flexibility to report additionally on programme domains (report page 24)

- (4) the reports of programme evaluations and institutional evaluations that have already been published should be grouped on the ARACIS web site, so that all programme evaluation reports for a particular university or other higher education institution can be viewed and accessed on the same web page(s) and that this should also be a feature to be considered when ARACIS reports produced under the new evaluation methodology are presented on its web site (report page 24)

- (5) be prepared enhance its Information Technology arrangements to enable it to deliver improved performance, storage and organisation of data and the ARACIS website (report page 24)

- (6) [ARACIS should] strengthen the existing links between the Chairs of the Permanent Commissions and the Council through creating a new advisory committee of Chairs of the Permanent Commissions (report page 26).[105]

Concerning ESG 2.6 EQAR has following 'flagged issue' to be considered in the next review:

ESG 2.6 Reporting [ESG 2005: standard 3.7]

- For institutional evaluations, it should receive explicit attention whether the entire expert panel is involved in drafting and agreeing upon the main evaluation report.

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[105] See ESG Standard 3.1. Numbers were given here to allow easy orientation. In the original text were no numbers

Evidence

ARACIS publishes reports of each evaluation it undertakes under its various procedures. For the 20 universities evaluated under the QUALITAS project (see above, pages 12 and 40) the 'Summary Reports' were also translated into English and published on the ARACIS website.[106] To prepare for the site visit, the review panel requested translations in English of the report of an evaluation of a study programme and the reports from an institutional evaluation. The latter comprised reports from student and foreign evaluators and the 'Synthetic Report' – see below).

According to the SAR, the process ARACIS follows when developing the report for an **evaluation of a study programme** after a site visit is as follows. Visit record forms are drawn up by the member of the Permanent Specialty Commission who has accompanied the evaluation panel. The findings of each panel member are entered on the visit record form, which is signed by all members of the panel and by the representatives of the institution that has had a programme evaluated. The panel members then draw up and sign the panel's 'Synthesis' report of the evaluation to highlight the main points that have been identified for attention and praise.

After a programme evaluation site visit, the institution can send comments and proposed additions for the report to ARACIS which, if they are to be considered, must reach the Agency before the session of the Permanent Specialty Commission at which the evaluation report is to be considered. The Synthesis report of the evaluation panel and the Visit record form, together with the response (if any) of the institution to the site visit and to the evaluation panel's findings, are presented by the panel coordinator to the Permanent Specialty Commission, which draws up its own evaluation report for the ARACIS Council.[107] Reports of programme evaluations are not, as a rule, available on the ARACIS web site other than in Romanian.

I**nstitutional evaluations** involve a large panel of nine or more expert reviewers with numbers varying according to the number of study programmes included as part of the institutional evaluation. For institutional evaluations the 'Director of Mission' (a member of the ARACIS Council) attends the site visit for the evaluation, together with a 'panel coordinator' nominated by the Council.

For institutional evaluations, the Director of Mission completes the visit record form on which are set out the findings and recommendations of the evaluation panel. The visit record form is signed by each member of the evaluation panel and by the representatives of the institution that has hosted the evaluation. For programme evaluations undertaken as part of an institutional evaluation, individual visit record forms are completed for each programme evaluated by the respective programme evaluators (one of whom will be a member of the relevant Permanent Specialty Commission).

Again, for institutional evaluations, the two student members of the panel draw up and sign a separate report as does the foreign evaluator. The evaluated institution receives a draft of the institutional evaluation report to correct errors of fact and present clarifications.

Reports of institutional evaluations. All the documents listed above, including the response letter of the evaluated institution containing its clarifications, are analysed within the Department of External Quality Evaluation which draws up its own report, proposing a Decision and judgment for the

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[106] SAR, p. 50 and http://www.aracis.ro/en/eval-results/institutional-evaluations/
[107] SAR p.39.

evaluated institution to the ARACIS Council. The report by the Department to the Council is accompanied by a 'synthesis report' of the results of the evaluation.[108]

For the **evaluation of Master Studies Domains** and the **awarding of the EURACE-Label** the reporting procedure is similar to that for study programmes.[109]

For the **evaluation of 17 Law study programmes in Moldova**, the SAR described how reporting was governed by the contract between the Agency and the Moldovan Ministry of Education. This required ARACIS to publish a 'Generalised Report', on completion of the project. The 'Generalised Report' was published in Romanian and English on the Agency's website, together with evaluation reports for each of the study programmes evaluated, in Romanian.

Commenting on its reporting arrangements for evaluations in the SAR, ARACIS considered that there was scope for improving the effectiveness of reporting. The SAR observed that in Romania only 'official' signed, full length documents were regarded as credible and that for this reason it still considered it necessary to publish separately all the component reports of an institutional evaluation including the reports of the student evaluators, foreign evaluators and the Department of External Quality Evaluation together with the 'Synthetic Report' for institutional evaluations.[110]

In the SAR, ARACIS pointed to the 'Synthetic Report' as the means it had adopted to deal with the **first** and **second recommendation** of the 2013 ENQA review report, and to help potential students and employers of Romanian graduates to read about the findings and the results of ARACIS evaluations. To this end it had developed a template for such Synthetic Reports that had been approved by the Council. 'Synthetic (Summary) Reports'[111] for institutional evaluations undertaken from 2013 to 2017 which had been prepared as part of the Institutional Evaluation Report[112] are published in Romanian on the ARACIS web site.[113]

For the **third recommendation** ARACIS explained that it was researching what students needed from institutional evaluation reports through its participation in the ESU's QUEST project. This had also been part of the QUALITAS project the survey questionnaires for which had included many questions to investigate on students and employer's opinions. In the SAR ARACIS also referred the review panel to two analyses 'Policy paper. Institutional policies and strategies in Higher Education' and 'The Quality Barometer. Quality Monitor of the Romanian Higher Education System' which were published in English on the website.[114]

For the **fourth and fifth recommendations** (the ARACIS website) the Agency takes the view that its current website is outdated and that further work to reorganise it would be wasted effort. It has therefore included the enhancement of its information technology arrangements in the overall scope of the QAFIN project which is due to begin in 2018-2019.[115] When this work is complete ARACIS will

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[108]   SAR p. 40.
[109]   SAR p. 41.
[110] SAR p.43.
[111]   'Raport de sinteza'
[112]   'Raport de evaluare institutionala'
[113] SAR, p. 50. See also Quality Barometer 2015. p.249.
[114] SAR, p. 50.
[115]   See above, p.14

have the benefit of modernised information technology arrangements that will improve its capacity to store and organise data. [116]

The **sixth recommendation** concerned the organisation of a standing committee for the chairs of the Permanent Specialty Commissions to enable them to coordinate their work better; it is dealt with elsewhere in this report (see above page 26 and page 42, below).

The ENQA review report of 2013 contains also following recommendation, which was referred to ESG 2.2, but belongs now to ESG 2.6 Reporting:

-   consider the benefits for students and stakeholders for there to be a main report on each university and higher education institution with the possibility to report additionally on programme domains at each institution where relevant (report page 13)[117]

As stated in the SAR, ARACIS considers that the 'Synthetic Report' of institutional evaluations should meet the needs of students and employers. The Agency expects to make further progress in this matter once its new website is in use. [118]

Analysis

The review panel discussed the Agency's reporting arrangements with those it met throughout the site visit. Concerning the EQAR flagged issue (all members of evaluation panels, including students, to contribute to evaluation reports) the panel notes some progress. It was told that each member of the evaluator panel in institutional evaluations has some hand in drafting the reports. In 2018, for institutional evaluations, separate reports from the students and the international evaluators are still a feature of the Agency's reporting arrangements. Students, including student evaluators who met the panel told it that the student evaluators' report was highly valued by students as a frank account of the institution from the students' perspective. The panel can therefore understand why students might want ARACIS to retain the students' report as part of its institutional evaluation procedures. Nonetheless, the panel considers that the number of individual reports that, together, comprise an ARACIS institutional evaluation report makes it difficult for external stakeholders to understand the institution as viewed by those that have evaluated it on behalf of ARACIS.

The panel acknowledges that ARACIS understands the importance of communicating the findings of its institutional evaluations clearly and concisely to students and other stakeholders. Likewise, the panel acknowledges and welcomes the work ARACIS has done to develop its 'synthetic report' format as a way of achieving a more holistic view of an institution within the confines of its current Methodology and structures. The review panel recommends that ARACIS continues to develop a single consolidated report format for the evaluation procedures that will follow the 2018 Methodology.

The review panel finds that the **first** and **second recommendation** from the 2013 report, concerning ESG Standard 2.6 are not yet fully implemented and that more work is required on each. Concerning the **third recommendation** (research into what information students and employers need from reports) the panel acknowledges the efforts ARACIS has made. It seemed to the panel that ARACIS is still wedded to the need for its evaluation reports to be written for specialists in the quality assurance of higher education. The panel considers that to continue with this approach would not serve the

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[116] SAR, p. 51.
[117] Please see ESG Standard 2.6
[118] SAR, p. 47.

interests of students and other stakeholders or, ultimately, ARACIS itself. The panel therefore recommends that ARACIS should develop ways of communicating the findings of its evaluations in plain language to the widest possible readership.

The **fourth recommendation** has been put into practice and the 2018 panel found that the results of its evaluations are now more clearly displayed on the Agency's website and that they are now grouped via web links under the name of the relevant provider. They are not, however, as yet searchable. On the **fifth recommendation** ARACIS reported that it had gained the funding to modernise its information technology arrangements and web site, through the QAFIN project. Nonetheless unless the increased funding it has won is matched by a better understanding of the potential of even simple information technology changes to transform its work ARACIS, will not be able to show the next ENQA review panel that it has fully addressed this recommendation. On the **sixth recommendation** (concerning a standing committee for the Chairs of the Permanent Specialty Commissions) the review panel considers that it is now more urgent for ARACIS to address the procedural weaknesses in the operations of the Permanent Specialty Commissions that are highlighted on page 26 .

Overall, the review panel finds that the reports that ARACIS publishes of programme and institutional evaluations are mostly descriptive with some analysis – a feature that ARACIS itself acknowledges and is attempting to tackle through workshops with representatives from higher education institutions who are working on their own self evaluations for ARACIS reviews. The panel welcomes this development. Throughout the review the panel worked with English translations of ARACIS documents, many of which were highly technical. Reading Romanian documents in translation may have made it difficult for the panel to assess their accessibility for native Romanian speakers. It is, however, confident that the contents of the ARACIS documents it read should be more plainly expressed for a general readership rather than for a primarily technical audience.

When the 2013 review panel considered how ARACIS published its reports it went into some detail to explain that because ARACIS published its reports as portable document format (pdf) images their contents were not accessible to internet search engines and therefore to a wider readership (including students) seeking for information about higher education in Romania in general, and for information about particular study programmes or institutions. The continuing failure of ARACIS in 2018 to publish its evaluation reports in searchable format points to the need for more active management of its digital resources. When the review panel raised this matter with ARACIS it was told that a resolution of this matter was awaiting investments in a new web site, through the QAFIN project (see above, p.13).

This matter featured as a recommendation in the 2013 report and the 2018 panel notes the lack of progress that has been made to deal with this matter. The 2013 recommendations that have not yet been dealt therefore remain relevant in 2018.

Panel recommendations

- For its new evaluation methodology ARACIS should broaden its view of the intended readership of its reports at programme and institutional levels to embrace potential students, those who advise them, and employers of Romanian graduates, and provide reports that are more accessible to a wider readership.

- As it develops its new information systems under the QAFIN Project, ARACIS should ensure that they deliver improved performance, storage, organisation and presentation of data,

including via the new ARACIS website, and that all the contents of its reports can be indexed by internet search engines.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

> Standard:
>
> Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Evidence

New procedures for handling complaints and appeals were developed by ARACIS as part of its response to ESG 2015. Appeals against the findings of an evaluation panel can be submitted by the institution that has hosted an ARACIS evaluation visit.[119] ARACIS does not have a permanent appeals commission but establishes a new ad hoc commission to deal with each case.

Evaluation of study programmes. Appeals against the findings of an evaluation can be submitted within two weeks from receipt by the institution of the evaluation report from ARACIS. When such an appeal is received by ARACIS, its contents are analysed by the Executive Board which sets up an ad hoc commission to investigate. This commission analyses the documentation ARACIS has collected from the institution and generated during the evaluation. On the basis of the original appeal, the evidence gathered during the evaluation, and its own analysis, the appeal commission drafts a report for the Accreditation Department which it sends to the Council. Having analysed and discussed the report from the Accreditation Department the Council drafts a report setting out its findings, either upholding or rejecting the appeal.[120] This procedure is also valid for evaluations of study programmes that lead to the **award of the EUR-ACE® Label**.[121]

For appeals against the findings of the **evaluations of Law study programmes in Moldova** the SAR stated that the results of the external evaluations were sent to the Moldovan Ministry of Education for observations and comments. The Ministry asked for a second evaluation for four study programme, for which it considered that the available information did not fully support the conclusion that had been reached. ARACIS met the requirement and, after a second visit performed by a different panel, produced an improved report,. This report was fully endorsed by the Moldovan Ministry, together with the results reported initially for the other 13 study programmes.[122]

Appeals against the findings of **institutional evaluations** on the basis of procedural failings can be submitted within two weeks from the publication of the report. The Executive Board of ARACIS Council reanalyses the report and invites the university's rector and its contact person for the evaluation to a meeting with ARACIS at its offices for discussions. If, after this meeting, the representatives of the institution wish to maintain their appeal, the Executive Board of ARACIS Council establishes a commission to assess the appeal, which, based on evaluation documents, checks whether the

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[119] 'Contestaţii in Romanian
[120] SAR p.43
[121] SAR p.44.
[122] SAR p.44

procedural flaws mentioned in the appeal are real or not. If the procedural flaws are found to be real, the commission can advise the Council to conduct another evaluation to correct the reported defects. In such a case, the Council advised by the Executive Board constitutes an appeals commission the membership of which includes evaluators to carry out a further visit to the higher education institution and who will draft a new report after the visit. The procedure requires ARACIS to publish the content of the appeal as well as the Report of ARACIS Council regarding the resolution of the appeal on its website within five working days from the ARACIS meeting in which the results of the appeal were approved.[123]

In the Agency's procedures a complaint may refer to an alleged lack of integrity or improper behaviour on the part of an external evaluator(s). If the complaint can be shown to be factually correct, ARACIS follows the provisions of its 'Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct' in providing redress. Complaints can also be made against ARACIS for the way it has undertaken contract work or external evaluations. Complaints must be made to ARACIS in writing and must be registered with ARACIS within five working days from the evaluation visit. If the reported violations of the Code of Ethics and Rules of Conduct are found to have substance the ARACIS Council may decide to re-run the evaluation procedures to correct the reported issues.[124]

The SAR provided statistics for the number of appeals and complaints that ARACIS had received between 2013 and 2017. In that period there were 46 appeals against findings for study programme evaluations (Licenta and Masterat) out of 2,314 evaluations, and five at institutional level out of 74 external evaluations. Of these appeals, 16 of those made against the results of study programme evaluations were partially or wholly upheld and no appeals against the outcomes of institutional evaluations were upheld.

From 2013 to 2017 ARACIS has received only one written complaint. The SAR stated that no evidence was found to uphold the complaint and that it was settled without recourse to formal procedures.[125]

Analysis

ARACIS has procedures for complaints and appeals in place, which cover its evaluation activities. It is the Agency's view that the small number of appeals and complaints it has received to date does not justify moving from the use of ad hoc commissions to more permanent arrangements to handle complaints and appeals where specialised knowledge and training would ensure that they are handled thoroughly, fairly, and effectively.

In the course of the site visit, the review panel had opportunities to discuss the Agency's procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals with those it met. Outside members of the staff of ARACIS, and members of the Council, those who met the panel were unaware that ARACIS had procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals – although those who met the panel were confident that if they or their institution found something amiss with an evaluation, or the resulting report, that ARACIS would tackle the matter. The panel suggests that ARACIS should make information about its procedures for handling complaints and appeals more widely known.

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[123] SAR p.43.
[124] SAR p. 44.
[125] SAR, p.43.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

-   ARACIS should take steps to make its appeals and complaints procedure more widely known.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

GENDER BALANCE

In the SAR ARACIS explained that it was taking part in a new EU project for a better application of gender equality criteria, Project TARGET.

The review panel recognises the value to ARACIS of its participation in Project TARGET, particularly since the gender imbalance in the groups the panel met during the site visit were as marked as they were for meetings with the 2013 review panel.

The panel recognise that ARACIS is aware that it needs to tackle the gender imbalance among its senior managers and evaluators and urges the Agency to redouble its efforts to secure better representation of women in all aspects of the academic and evaluation work of ARACIS including at the most senior levels. There has been little improvement in this area since 2013. Failure to make substantial progress towards greater representation for women in the work of ARACIS between now and the next external review of ARACIS would have the potential to affect the Agency's reputation adversely.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

The panel acknowledge the sustained effort of ARACIS to raise external funding to continue the series of the Quality Barometer reports as a very good source of information about the Romanian Higher Education System (ESG 3.4).

The review panel is pleased to note that ARACIS has worked energetically to address the recommendation from 2013, to provide support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions (ESG 2.2).

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

		Recommendations
ESG 2.1	Substantially compliant	ARACIS should cease to treat 'learning outcomes' and 'competences' as synonymous in its evaluation methods; ARACIS should develop a manual to disseminate the concept of learning outcomes to its evaluators and to higher education institutions in Romania.
ESG 2.2	Substantially compliant	ARACIS should continue to take steps within its existing methodology to bring its practice into closer alignment with the focus in ESG 2015 on student-centeredness, learning outcomes and enhancement. ARACIS should undertake an analysis of the costs and the level of workload to higher education institutions and other interested parties of the current Romanian higher education quality assurance system.
ESG 2.3	Fully compliant	-
ESG 2.4	Fully compliant	-
ESG 2.5	Fully compliant	-
ESG 2.6	Partially compliant	For its new evaluation methodology ARACIS should broaden its view of the intended readership of its reports at programme and institutional levels to embrace potential students, those who advise them, and employers of Romanian graduates, and provide reports that are more accessible to a wider readership. As it develops its new information systems under the QAFIN Project, ARACIS should ensure that they deliver improved performance, storage, organisation and presentation of data, including via the new ARACIS website, and that all its reports can be indexed by internet search engines.
ESG 2.7	Fully compliant	-
ESG 3.1	Partially compliant	The panel recommends that the respective responsibilities of the Council, the President, the Executive Board, the Chief

		Executive Officer and the Secretary General should be more clearly drawn in the interests of transparency, accountability and good governance.
		The panel recommends the creation of a strategic plan setting aims for the Agency's own development with targets against which ARACIS can measure its progress and as a means of informing the Ministry of National education, higher education institutions and all those who work with ARACIS of its priorities and expectations. The panel suggest to ENQA that after one year it asks to see a draft strategic plan from ARACIS for the next 5 years.
		To work on the shift from quality assurance as compliance to quality assurance for enhancement, ARACIS should seek the support of the Ministry for a partnership project led by ARACIS with the Ministry and the HEIs to give substance to what is at present an aspiration.
		The panel recommend that ARACIS should either implement the 2013 recommendation, for a stakeholders' committee and embrace a more generous definition of stakeholder, or that it substantially increase the number of stakeholder representatives on its Council.
ESG 3.2	Fully compliant	-
ESG 3.3	Fully compliant	-
ESG 3.4	Fully compliant	-
ESG 3.5	Substantially compliant	The panel urge ARACIS to discuss the present fees regime with HEIs and the ministry with a view to ensuring that the level of fees it charges for its evaluations takes into account its operational costs more realistically and explore other ways to secure funding for its office services including information technology.
ESG 3.6	Substantially compliant	ARACIS should provide searchable digital copies of evaluation reports to the members of its Permanent Specialty Commissions and other committees in advance of meetings where such reports are discussed.
ESG 3.7	Fully compliant	-

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, ARACIS is in compliance with the ESG.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

ESG 2.1	-
ESG 2.2	-
ESG 2.3	-
ESG 2.4	The inclusion of more practical exercises and simulations in the training sessions for the evaluators, including sessions to enable them to consider their roles and ARACIS's expectations of them.
	ARACIS should introduce quality control arrangements to check the effectiveness of the training it provides for its evaluators and should also check whether periodic practical training and simulations should be provided for all continuing evaluators as well as for those newly appointed.
ESG 2.5	-
ESG 2.6	-
ESG 2.7	ARACIS should take steps to make its appeals and complaints procedure more widely known.
ESG 3.1	-
ESG 3.2	-
ESG 3.3	ARACIS to explore how to take a more proactive role within the scope of legal possibilities to foster improvements in higher education in Romania.
ESG 3.4	ARACIS should comply with the requirements of the Methodology to produce annual 'synthetic' reports that bring together and analyse the outcomes of its evaluation and other reports in support of quality improvements and publicise its findings to its stakeholders.
	ARACIS should take further steps to improve the dissemination of its research reports and other analyses to its stakeholders and other interested parties.
ESG 3.5	-
ESG 3.6	-
ESG 3.7	-

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

		Sunday, 04.03.2018		
As necessary	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day I A pre-visit meeting with the Agency **contact person** to clarify elements related to the overall system and context (if requested)	Contact person: Prof. dr. ing. Radu-Mircea Damian, Director, International relations, projects and cooperation	Location: Hotel Pullman	
		Day 1 Monday, 05.03.2018		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
9:00-9:30	Review panel's private meeting	-		
9:30-10:15	Meeting with the CEO and the chair of the Board (or equivalent)	Prof. dr. ing. Iordan Petrescu, President of ARACIS		
10:15-11:00	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report	1. Prof. dr. ing. Radu-Mircea Damian, Director 2. Carmen Mirian and 3. Mihai Marcu, Experts, Professional Staff, Quality Assurance 4. Prof. dr. Ioan Ianos – Secretary General of the Council 5. Prof. dr. Adrian Opre – Council member 6. Prof. dr. ing. Anton Hadar, Representative of trade-unions in HE 7. Dr. ing. Ion Stanciulescu, President of Romanian Employers in Design and Research, Vicepresident, National Confederation of Romanian Employers		

		8. Vlad Chereches, Student representative - ANOSR 9. Nicolae Tunsoiu, Student representative - UNSR 10. Adina Nica, Officer, International relations, projects, communication and events 11. Gianina Buiuc, Internal Quality Assurance Officer		
11:00-11:15	Review panel's private discussion			
11:15-12:00	Meeting with the Executive Board (all are members of the Council) NOTE: meetings with Council members have been proposed after lunch – see below)	ARACIS Executive Board: 1. Prof. dr. ing. Iordan Petrescu, President of ARACIS 2. Prof. dr. Ioan Ianos, Secretary General Members: 3. Prof. dr. ing. Simona Lache, Director, Accreditation Department 4. Assoc. prof. Madalin Bunoiu, Director, Quality External Evaluation Department 5. Vlad Chereches, student 6. Nicolae Tunsoiu, student		
12:00-12:15	Review panel's private discussion			
12:15-13:00	Meeting with key staff of the Agency/staff in charge of evaluations ("professional staff" as in the SAR)	ARACIS Experts, Professional Staff, QA 1. Sorin Alecsa 2. Mihaela Bajenaru 3. Cristina Busuioc 4. Marilena Dobre 5. Roxana Florea 6. Daniela Ispas 7. Vlad Popescu		
13:00-14:30	Lunch (panel only)			

14:30-15:10	Meeting with **department/key body** of the Agency 1. Accreditation Department (Council members) (all are members of the Council)	1. Prof. dr. ing. Simona Lache, Director 2. Prof. dr. Nicoleta Corbu 3. Prof. dr. Gheorghe Grigoras 4. Prof. dr. ing. Anton Hadar 5. Prof. dr. Nagy Ladislau 6. Prof. dr. Vasilica Stan 7. Student Nicolae Tunsoiu - UNSR		
15:10-15:20	Review panel's private discussion			
15:20-16:00	Meeting with department/key body of the Agency 2 2. Quality External Evaluation Department (Council members) (all are members of the Council)	1. Assoc. prof. Madalin Bunoiu, Director 2. Prof. dr. Ioan Lascar 3. Prof. dr. ing. Neculai Seghedin 4. Prof. dr. Iamandi Luca 5. Prof. dr. Adrian Opre 6. Prof. dr. Ion Popa 7. Prof. dr. ing. Dorian Cojocaru 8. Dr. ing. Romeo-Cristian Erbasu, Employers' Representative 9. Student Vlad Chereches - ANOSR		
16:00-16:15	Review panel's private discussion			
16:15-17:00	Meeting with administrative and financial staff of the Agency	1. Ion Tanase, Economic Director 2. Marilena Lolea, Director, Organisation, Human Resources, and Public Acquisitions 3. Prof. dr. ing. Radu-Mircea Damian, Director, International relations, projects and cooperation 4. Adina Nica and 5. Adriana Popoiu, Officers, International relations, projects, communication and events 6. Gianina Buiuc, Internal Quality Assurance Officer 7. Adriana Cosovanu, Financial Officer		

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
		8. Emilia Mircea, Legal and IQA Department 8. Cristian Eni, IT officer		
17:00 - as necessary	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day II	-		
20:00	Dinner (panel only)	-		
<td colspan="5" align="center">Day 2 Tuesday, 06.03.2018</td>
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
8:30-9:00	Review panel private meeting	-		
9:00-9:30	Meeting with ministry representatives	1. Cristina Vasilica Icociu, Ministry of National Education (Ministry of Education), Cabinet Director 2. Ion Ciuca, Ministry of Education, Director, Governance of Higher Education Institutions Direction 3. Elena Janina Valcea, Ministry of Education, Director, Management of University Programs Direction 4. Victor Iliescu, Ministry of Education, General Director, Inspection and Control General Direction	1. Cristina Vasilica Icociu, Associate Professor, University Politehnica of Bucharest 2. Ion Ciuca, Professor, University Politehnica of Bucharest 3. Elena Janina Valcea, Lecturer, University Politehnica of Bucharest 4. Victor Iliescu, Professor, University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest* *The labour legislation allows university teaching staff to work also as civil servants, members of Parliament, Government etc. holding their teaching positions	
9:30-9:45	Review panel's private discussion			

9:45-10:45	Meeting with heads of some reviewed HEIs/HEI representatives	1. Prof. dr. Marilen Pirtea, Rector, West University of Timisoara (state univ.), Vicepresident of National Rectors' Council 2. Mihnea Costoiu, Rector, University Politehnica of Bucharest (state univ.) 3. Prof. dr. Ovidiu Folcut, Rector, Romanian-American University of Bucharest (private univ) 4. Prof. dr. ing. Radu Vacareanu, Rector, Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (state univ., partner in IMPALA project) 5. Prof. dr. Dumitru Gheorghiu, Vicerector, University "Titu Maiorescu" of Bucharest (private univ.) 6. Prof. dr. Daniel Breaz, Rector, Univ. "1 December 1918" of Alba-Iulia (state univ.) 7. Prof. dr. ing. Ghita Barsan, Rector, "N. Balcescu" Land Forces Academy, Sibiu (state univ.)		
10:45-11:00	Review panel's private discussion	-		
11:00-11:45	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs	1. Assoc. prof. Bogdan Nadolu, West University of Timisoara (state univ.) 2. Prof. dr. ing. Diana Robescu, Univ. Politehnica Bucharest (state univ.) 3. Prof. dr. ing. Violeta Ciucur, Univ. Maritima Constanta (state univ.) 4. Prof. dr. ing. Constatin Sarmasanu-Chihai, Univ. "Gh. Asachi" of Iasi (state univ.) 5. Assoc. prof. Mara Gyongyver, Univ. Sapientia of Cluj-Napoca (private univ.)		IQA structures in HEIs include mostly academics: the term "officers" is to be understood as generic (in charge with...)

		6. Assoc. prof. Anca Bandoi, Univ.of Craiova (state univ.) 7. Corina Morutan, Univ. of Medicine and Farmacy "Iuliu Hatieganu" of Cluj-Napoca (state univ.)		
15 minutes 11:45-12:00	Review panel's private discussion			
60 minutes 12:00-13:00	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool and Chairs of Permanent specialty commissions	1. Prof. dr. Marieta Costache, Secretary of the Permanent specialty commission of Exact and Natural Sciences 2. Prof. dr. Mihaela Gheorghe, Member of the Permanent specialty commission of Humanities, Theology 3. Prof. dr. Gabriel Edmond Olteanu, President of the Permanent specialty commission of Law, involved in evaluations in R. of Moldova 4. Prof. dr. Teodora Cristina Roman, President of the Permanent specialty commission of Economic Sciences 5. Prof. dr. ing. Constantin Vertan, President of the Permanent specialty commission of Engineering Sciences 6. Prof. dr. Alexandru Chiş, Secretary of the Permanent specialty commission of Distance and Part-time Learning 7. Prof. dr. Lucian Ciolan, President the Permanent specialty commission of Administration, Education, Psychology 8. Prof. dr. Dana Galieta Mincă, ARACIS evaluator - Medical Sciences 9. Prof. dr. Flavius Baias, ARACIS evaluator - Law, involved in evaluations in R. of Moldova		

		10. Prof. dr. Lizica Szilagy, ARACIS evaluator - Agronomic Sciences 11. Assoc. prof. Oana Preda, ARACIS evaluator - Economic Sciences		
60 minutes 13:00-14:00	Lunch (panel only)			
45 minutes 14:00-14:45	Meeting with student evaluators from RNE-S	UNSR: 1. Daniela Cîtu, University Politehnica Bucharest 2. Marian Costel Dalban, University "Al.I. Cuza" of Iași 3. Sebastian-Aurelian Ştefăniga, West University of Timișoara ANOSR: 4. Vlad Cherecheş, master student, University of Bucharest, member of ARACIS Council 5. Ştefan Marius Deaconu – doctoral student, University of Bucharest, member of ARACIS Permanent specialty commission of Humanities and Theology 6. Horia Şerban Onița, University of Bucharest, member of ARACIS Permanent specialty commission of Law USR: 7. Alin Grigore - doctoral student, University of Bucharest 8. Dragoș Andrei Stoica, doctoral student, Bucharest University of Economic Studies		
15 minutes 14:45-15:00	Review panel's private discussion			

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
30 minutes 15:00-15:30	Talk with one or two representatives from HEI from Moldova (via Skype)	1. Assoc. prof. Viorelia Moldovan-Batranac, Free International University of Moldova, Chisinau (private univ.) 2. Assoc. prof. Alexandru Armeanic, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, Chisinau (state univ.)		1-2 univ. representatives from R. of Moldova from study programs in Law evaluated by ARACIS
15:30-16:15	Meeting with stakeholders, such as employer representatives, students, local community	1. Dr. ing. Romeo-Cristian Erbasu, Council member, President of the Federation of Employers of Construction Industry Societies; Vicepresident of UGIR – General Union of Romanian Industrialists 2. Prof. dr. ing. Tiberiu Gabriel Dobrescu, President, National Qualifications Authority (ANC) 3. Prof. dr. ing. Nicolae Postăvaru, Director, National Qualifications Authority (ANC) 4. Dr. ing. Ion Stanciulescu, President of Romanian Employers in Design and Research, Vicepresident, National Confederation of Romanian Employers		
16:15 - as necessary	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day III and provisional conclusions			
20:00	Dinner (panel only)			
Day 3 Wednesday, 07.03.2018				
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
8:30-9:00	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify			
9:00-9:30	Meeting with CEO to clarify any pending issues	President of ARACIS Prof. dr. ing. Iordan Petrescu	t.b.d.	

9:30-11:00	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings			
11:00-12:00	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Council/Board members of the Agency to inform about preliminary findings	ARACIS Executive Board: 1. Prof. dr. ing. Iordan Petrescu, President of ARACIS 2. Prof. dr. ing. Cristina Ghitulica, Vicepresident 3. Prof. dr. Ioan Ianos, Secretary General 4. Prof. dr. ing. Simona Lache, Director, Accreditation Department 5. Assoc. prof. Madalin Bunoiu, Director, Quality External Evaluation Department Staff: 6. Prof. dr. ing. Radu-Mircea Damian, Director, International relations, projects and cooperation 7. Carmen Mirian, Expert, Professional Staff, Quality Assurance 8. Ion Tanase, Economic Director 9. Adina Nica, Officer, International relations, projects, communication and events		
12:00	Lunch (panel only) Departure			

External review of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

March 2017

1. Background and Context

ARACIS was established in 2005 by Government Emergency Ordinance, approved by the Parliament as Law in 2006, to enhance QA in Higher Education according to the ESG 2005. ARACIS also took over accreditation of study programmes and institutions from the former Romanian National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation. ARACIS is an independent, autonomous public institution of national interest, funded from evaluation fees paid by HE institutions on contract-based relations, and from projects. The external evaluation Methodology was developed by ARACIS and approved by Governmental Decision No.1418/2006, initiated by the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research.

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

- Evaluating, according to quality criteria and standards, the capacity of education providers 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 to the Ministry of National Education strategies and policies of permanently improving higher education quality, in close correlation with pre-university education.

The current activity is performed according to the "Methodology for quality assurance, provisional authorization and accreditation of study programs and of higher education institutions". Quality evaluation activities are detailed in the Guide approved by the Council.

Evaluation of master Study Domains has been initiated following a procedure which is still in progress to be finalized. In addition to information presented in the **ARACIS FOLLOW-UP REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2015, and in "further clarifications letter" sent to ENQA on** January 2016, the "Procedures for accrediting/periodic external evaluation of the Master study programmes" were approved and applied from 28.04.2014

http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Comunicate_Media/2014/Proceduri_privind_acreditarea_sau_evaluarea_periodica_a_domeniilor_de_studii_universitare_de_master.pdf.

Work on the detailed procedure for Master Study domains is still in progress. The Specific Procedure for the External Periodic Evaluation of Accredited Master Study domains (in the following parts of the

document shall be referred to as the "Specific Procedure" or (SP)) was approved in 2014 by Ministerial Order, Published in the Official Gazette, Part I nr.236/2014:

http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/OM_nr._146_din_2014.pdf

The detailed ARACIS Procedure, following the approval of the Specific Procedure, was approved by ARACIS Council to make operational the provisions of the Specific Procedure approved by Ministerial Order. This document was published on the ARACIS webpage http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Comunicate_Media/2014/Proceduri_privind_evaluarea_do meniilor_de_master_08.04.2014_-_FINAL.pdf (in Romanian).

The roll out of the Specific Procedure is in its initial phase and full implementation is scheduled to be finalized in 2018.

The agency shall draft and publish reports on evaluation of Master domains when the methodology for accreditation and evaluation of master domains has been finalized and is being rolled out. These reports would not always be connected with institutional evaluations, mainly because the evaluation of Master domains shall be still performed at different moments of time. At the moment, we estimate that evaluation of Master domains will begin to be performed together with evaluations of institutions in 2 year time.

The new Methodology based on ESG 2015 has been drafted and is now in process to be finalized together with external stakeholders – students' unions, representatives of employers. The Guide, which details quality evaluation activities as per new Methodology based on ESG 2015, shall be approved by the Council.

ARACIS has been partner in several international projects and cooperation with ENQA and other QA agencies such as IMPALA _EACEA _LLL Project: Impact Analysis of Quality Assurance, AQUA-TS: exchange of good practice in VET quality indicators, EACEA_LLL Project, participation in ENQA Working Groups of Staff Development and Excellence.

Collaboration with other agencies was stimulated by ARACIS membership in CEENQA, which proposed international experts within the framework of the project "Qualitas" (2014-2015) funded from EU funds. Cooperation with agencies members of Quality Audit Network (QAN) indentified common areas of interest and led to a joint publication. Several common activities, such as those with l'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie - AUF and under the framework of Pro Didactica Project 2016 – 2018 have been dedicated to the training of Evaluators and Staff of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education - ANACIP, R. of Moldova.

In addition, ARACIS has evaluated 17 Study Programs in Law studies in the Republic of Moldova (2014) finalized by a transversal report in 2015.

ARACIS has been a full member of ENQA since 2009 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership for the second time. The previous ENQA coordinated review was performed in 2013 and successfully finalized with recommendations. The ENQA Board requested a follow-up report by October 2015 on the actions ARACIS has undertaken to meet the recommendations. In particular, ARACIS was encouraged to strive for greater transparency, communicating its findings to non-specialist audiences, publishing more information about itself, on its website and in ways that make that information more readily available. It was mentioned that the next external review will give special attention to these points. After answering clarifications requested by the ENQA Board regarding the follow-up report, at

its meeting on 16 February 2016, the ENQA Board considered the letter from ARACIS (dated 27 January 2016) that had been requested on 20 November 2015 concerning the involvement of students in quality assurance procedures at ARACIS. The Board acknowledged the letter and took note that full implementation concerning standard 2.4 of the ESG will be in place by 2018.

ARACIS has been registered on EQAR since 2009 and is applying for renewal of registration for the second time. The first renewal application was accepted in 2014.

The Register Committee considered the Substantive Change Report of 3/3/2016. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from ARACIS on some matters (request of 18/05/16 and response of 13/06/16).

The Register Committee took note of the changes in the composition of the ARACIS Council. The Committee welcomed the now broader representation of different stakeholder backgrounds on the Council. The Register Committee took note of the newly established procedures for the (I.) external evaluation of Master Study domains, (II.) accreditation of a new Master Study domain and (III.) inclusion of a new Master Study programme in an accredited Master Study domain.

The Register Committee welcomed ARACIS' clarification as to the publication of the relevant procedures and criteria (re. II. & III.), as well as the explanation of how they correspond to the ESG. As the documents are not published in English, the Register Committee could not analyse the way in which the relevant procedures and criteria are published and clear. The Committee therefore underlined that the next external review of ARACIS (for renewal of registration on EQAR) should pay due attention to the way in which the relevant criteria and procedures are published (see standards 2.3 and 2.5, ESG 2015), next to the remaining standards of the ESG 2015.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent ARACIS fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of ARACIS should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support ARACIS's application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

2.1 Activities of ARACIS within the scope of the ESG

In order for ARACIS to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of ARACIS that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of ARACIS have to be addressed in the external review:

- External evaluation of study programmes: 1st cycle ("Licenta") and 2nd cycle ("Master");
- External evaluation of Higher Education Institutions (institutional evaluation/audit);
- External evaluation of master study domains.

The external review shall also address the activity of ARACIS to implement the recommendations of ENQA and EQAR, which were mentioned at section 1 of these Terms of Reference and the results obtained, according to the ESG 2015.

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by ARACIS including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to ARACIS;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide ARACIS with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards ARACIS's review.

3.2 Self-assessment by ARACIS, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

ARACIS is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;

- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background

description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.

- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which ARACIS fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.

- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the ENQA Guidelines for External Review of Quality Assurance Agencies, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.

- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

ARACIS will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to ARACIS at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by ARACIS in arriving in Bucharest, Romania.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and ARACIS.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to ARACIS within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If ARACIS chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by ARACIS, finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

ARACIS is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which ARACIS expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

ARACIS will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. ARACIS commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by ARACIS. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether ARACIS has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to ARACIS and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by ARACIS, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. ARACIS may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

6. Budget

ARACIS shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for follow-up visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, ARACIS will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to ARACIS if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	March/May 2017
Appointment of review panel members	November/December 2017
Self-assessment completed	November 2017
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	December 2017
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	January/February 2018
Briefing of review panel members	February 2018
Review panel site visit	March 2018
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	By May 2018
Draft of evaluation report to ARACIS	Late May/Early June 2018
Statement of ARACIS to review panel if necessary	June 2018
Submission of final report to ENQA	July 2018
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of ARACIS	September 2018
Publication of the report	September 2018

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

This section provides an alphabetical listing of the abbreviations mentioned in the report, to be written out in their first use in the text and abbreviated each time thereafter. This box to be deleted before publishing.

ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015
evaluator	external expert in QA procedure
IQA	Internal Quality assurance
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
NRE	National Register of ARACIS Evaluators – NRE ("Registrul National al Evaluatorilor – RNE")
QA	quality assurance
SAR	self-assessment report
WG	Working group

ANNEX 4: DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ARACIS

Self-Assessment Report (November 2017)

Annex 1 - Romanian Legislative framework on Quality Assurance in Education
Annex 1.1 - Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality Assurance in Education, approved by the Law nr. 87/2006, with subsequent amendments and completions – referred in the SAR as the "Law"
Annex 1.2 - Law of National Education no. 1/2011, with subsequent amendments and completions (includes other legal provisions on quality assurance and ARACIS activity)
Annex 2 - The Methodology and Quality evaluation activities guide of ARACIS
Annex 2.1 - Methodology for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference, and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (referred in the SAR as the "Methodology") – link webpage ARACIS
Annex 2.2 - Quality evaluation activities guide for university study programs and for higher education institutions (ARACIS Guide; six Parts – in Romanian with subsequent modifications i.e., for study programs) - link webpage ARACIS
Annex 3 - Evaluations carried out by ARACIS during 01.01.2014 - 30.10.2017
Annex 4 - ARACIS Internal Quality Assurance
Annex 4.1 - ARACIS Code of ethics and Rules of conduct
Annex 4.2 - Contract with external evaluators (excerpt)
Annex 4.3 - List of ARACIS internal quality assurance procedures 64
Annex 5 - Organisation chart of ARACIS (up to 27.11.2017)
Annex 6 - Thematic analyses
Annex 6.1 - Perception of the policies and quality of Romanian higher education at the system level
Annex 6.2 - Opinion of the higher education institutions on the quality of ARACIS activities carried out in the external evaluation process
Annex 7 - Selection and nomination of Evaluators; Overview of training sessions
Annex 7.1 - Selection of the academics - members of the Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions
Annex 7.2 - Selection of the students – members of the Permanent (standing) Specialty Commissions
Annex 7.3 - Overview of Criteria/Sequencing of the nomination of academic experts for external evaluation missions
Annex 7.4 - Nomination of foreign (international) experts for evaluation missions at institutional level
Annex 7.5 - Selection of students in RNE and nomination of students in panels
Annex 7.6 – Training of ARACIS own staff
Annex 7.7 – Training of academic and student evaluators
Annex 8 - EUR-ACE Label evaluation and awarding: compliance with ESG Part 1
Annex 9 - Documents: ENQA and EQAR Recommendations and follow-up
Annex 9.1 - ENQA documents - link webpage ARACIS
Last ENQA coordinated external review report (2013)
ENQA Board letter to the Agency after the last review (28.10.2013)
Mid-term progress report by the Agency (30.09.2015)
Clarification request from ENQA regarding the Progress report (20.11.2015)

ARACIS response to the clarification request (27.01.2016)

Annex 9.2 - EQAR documents - link webpage ARACIS

EQAR letter to the Agency (22.05.2014)

Substantive Changes Report (03.03.2016)

Clarification request from EQAR regarding the Substantive Changes Report (18.05.2016)

ARACIS response to the clarification request (06.06.2016)

Letter from EQAR regarding the Substantive Changes Report (05.09.2016)

Annex 9.3 - Comparative analysis of judgments of previous ENQA coordinated reviews (2009, 2013)

Annex 10 - Overview of approved changes under Standards from Part 2 of ESG

On request the panel received following additional information:

- METHODOLOGY for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference and the list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Approved by Government Decision No.915/2007, Published in the Romanian Official Gazette No. 25/11.01.2018
- Letter of ARACIS Council: "Clarifications on the implementation of ARACIS Methodology of the external evaluation at institutional level, university study programs and master study domains", 26.01.2018
- Operational Procedure (English translation of IQA-Statement from website)
- Report from an evaluation of a study programme: "Public Administration" "Avram Iancu" Educational Association from Cluj-Napoca (English Translation)
- Report from an institutional evaluation (reports of student and foreign evaluator, "synthetic report", Report of the ARACIS Council): UNIVERSITY „APOLLONIA" of IAȘI
- Minutes of the ARACIS Council meeting on 27.11.2017 with annex decisions of ARACIS Council taken at the 27.11.2017 meeting (English translation)
- Explanatory Note: Evaluation of 17 Law Study Programs in R. of Moldova
- Note about DEQAR project (up-dated information related to ESG 2.6 Reporting)
- Annual statistics on the number of complaints and appeals received by ARACIS for institution-level and programme level reports/findings (including number of complaints/appeals that are upheld, by year for 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017)

Other used documents are taken by the website of the Agency and referred in the text with a web link.

ESG	Activities as per Table 5.1 in SAR				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Provisional authorizing to operate	Accreditation	Periodic (cyclical) evaluation	EUR-ACE Label Awarding	International/cross-border evaluation
	1.1 Study programs (SPs) Bachelor/"Licență"; Master) 1.2 HE institutions	2.1 Study programs (Bachelor/"Licență"; Master) 2.2 HE institutions 2.3 Master studies domains	3.1 Study programs (Bachelor/"Licență"; Master) 3.2 HE institutions 3.3 Master studies domains	4. Evaluation of Engineering Study Programs	5. Evaluation of 17 Study Programs in R. of Moldova
	ARACIS criteria, standards and performance indicators				
	Methodology – Annex 2.1			Annex 8, complementary to Methodology of Annex 2.1 (columns 1,2,3 in Table)	Contract with the Ministry of Education of Moldova (see Generalized Report[126])
1.1 Policy for QA	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C / C.1/ S.C.1.1/ PI.C.1.1.1, PI.C.1.1.2; C.8/ S.C.8.1; A/ A.1/ S.A.1.2/ PI.A.1.2.2, PI.A.1.2.3; B/ B.4/ S.B.4.1/ PI.B.4.1.1, PI.B.4.1.2, PI.B.4.1.3.			Items: 5.1; 5.2	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.2 Design and approval of programs	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): B/ B.1/ S.B.1.2; C/ C.2/ S.C.2.1/ PI.C.2.1.1.			Items: 1.1; 1.2;1.3;2.1;2.3; 3.4	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): B/ B.2/ S.B. 2.1/ PI.B.2.1.1, PI.B.2.1.2, PI.B.2.1.4, PI.B.2.1.5.			Items:2.1;2.2; 2.4	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.4 Student admission, recognition	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): B/ B.1/ S.B.1.2/ PI.B.1.2.1, PI.B.1.2.2, PI.B.1.2.3; S.B.1.1/ PI.B.1.1.1, PI.B.1.1.2;			Items: 4.1;4.2;4.3;4.4	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table

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	B.2/ S.B.2.1 C/ C.2/ S.C.2.1/ PI.C.2.1.1, PI.C.2.1.2; C.3/ S.C.3.1/ PI.C.3.1.1, PI.C.3.1.2.		
and certification			
1.5 Teaching staff	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C/ C.4/ S.C.4.1/ PI.C.4.1.1, PI.C.4.1.2, PI.C.4.1.3, PI.C.4.1.4.	Items: 3.1;	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.6 Learning resources and student support	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): A/ A.2/ S.A.2.1/ PI.A.2.1.1, PI.A.2.1.2, PI.A.2.1.3, PI.A.2.1.4; C/ C.5/ S.C.5.1/ PI.C.5.1.1, PI.C.5.1.2, PI.C.5.1.3, PI.C.5.1.4.	Items: 3.2	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.7 Information management	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C/ C.6/ S.C.6.1/ PI.C.3.6.1.	Items: 5.4;5.5	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.8 Public information	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C/ C.7/ S.C.7.1/ PI.C.3.7.1.	Items: 5.6	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs	Domain (Area)/ Criteria(C)/ Standard (S)/ Performance indicator (PI): C/ C.2/ S.C.2.1/ PI.C.2.1.1, PI.C.2.1.2.	Items: 5.3	Same as per columns 1-3 in the table
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	In Romania external evaluation is regulated by law. Romanian Higher education institutions and their programs undergo mandatory external quality assurance every five years	External quality assurance - every five years (ENAEE regulations consistent with Romanian law)	Institutions fulfil the obligations of their national regulations

Domains	Criteria	Correspondence ESG 2005	Correspondence ESG 2015
A. The normative basis of the study program	A1. The institutional legal framework	ESG 1.2	-
	A2. The normative framework of the program	ESG 1.2	ESG 1.2
B. The planning, implementation and results of the study program	B1. The finality of the study program (results of learning)	ESG 1.2	ESG 1.2
	B2. Curriculum	ESG 1.2	ESG 1.2 ESG 1.3
	B3. Discipline program	ESG 1.2	ESG 1.2 ESG 1.3
	B4. Curriculum support	ESG 1.5	ESG 1.6
	B5. Management of the educational process	ESG. 1.2	ESG. 1.2
	B6. Teaching – learning – evaluation process	ESG 1.3	ESG 1.3
	B7. Traineeships	ESG 1.3	ESG 1.3
	B8. Use of modern study technologies	ESG 1.5	ESG 1.6
	B9. Evaluation of academic results	ESG 1.3	ESG 1.1
	B10. Granting of titles, issue of diploma supplement	ESG 1.3	ESG 1.4
	B11. Transparency of public interest information regarding study programs and, if applicable, certificates, diplomas and qualifications offered	ESG 1.7	ESG 1.8
C. Teaching staff	C1. Teaching staff who assures	ESG 1.4	ESG 1.5

Domains	Criteria	Correspondence ESG 2005	Correspondence ESG 2015
	implementation of study programs		
	C2. Auxiliary teaching staff	ESG 1.4	ESG 1.5
	C3. Human Resources and Competence Management	ESG 1.4	ESG 1.5
D. Students	D1. Student career guidance	ESG 1.4	ESG 1.6
	D2. Monitoring of student's activities	ESG 1.3	ESG 1.4
	D3. Employment of students and continuing studies	ESG 1.6	ESG 1.7
E. Scientific activity	E1. Scientific activity as a part of professional development	-	-
	E2. Validation and dissemination of research results	-	ESG 1.5
	E3. Scientific training of teaching staff	ESG 1.4	ESG 1.5
F. Material and financial resources	F1. Area used	ESG 1.5	ESG 1.6
	F2. Material basis	ESG 1.5	ESG 1.6
	F3. Students social insurance	ESG 1.5	ESG 1.6
	F4. Students access to information	ESG 1.5	ESG 1.6
G. Quality management and continuous improvement	G1. Quality assurance policy	ESG 1.1 ESG 1.2	ESG 1.1 ESG 1.9
	G2. Internal quality management	ESG 1.1	ESG 1.1
	G3. Transparency and responsibility	ESG 1.1	ESG 1.1
	G4. External quality assurance	ESG 1.2	ESG 1.9
	G5. Other external evaluations and certifications	ESG 1.10	ESG 1.10

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), undertaken in 2018.