

Targeted review of Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) against the ESG

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

The present Terms of Reference were agreed between ARACIS (applicant), ENQA (coordinator) and EQAR.

October 2022

1. Background

Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) has been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2009 and is applying for renewal of EQAR registration based on a targeted external review against *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* coordinated by - The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

ARACIS has been a member of ENQA since 2009 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

ARACIS is carrying out the following activities within the scope of the ESG:

- Programme Authorisation (First Cycle)¹
- Programme Accreditation (First Cycle)²
- Programme Accreditation and awarding of EUR-ACE Label (First Cycle)³
- Programme Accreditation (Second Cycle)⁴
- Study domain Accreditation (Second Cycle)⁵
- Study domain accreditation (Third Cycle)⁶
- Institutional Evaluation⁷
- Evaluation of institutions organising doctoral study programs (IOSUD)⁸
- Joint programme evaluations

¹ Programme external evaluation/accreditation (First Cycle, Second Cycle)

² Programme external evaluation/accreditation (First Cycle, Second Cycle)

³ Programme external evaluation from the engineering field

⁴ Programme external evaluation/accreditation (First Cycle, Second Cycle)

⁵ Evaluation of master study domains

⁶ Evaluation of the establishment of new doctoral study domains

⁷ Institutional external evaluation/accreditation

⁸ Periodic external evaluation of institutions organising doctoral study programmes (programme)

All these activities will be included on the agency's profile on the EQAR website and linked to DEQAR database. NB: The agency may not upload reports from other activities to DEQAR.

Should anything change between the time of application and the review i.e. any type of changes that may affect the registered agency's substantial compliance with the ESG, the agency is expected to inform EQAR at the earliest convenience⁹.

2. Purpose and scope of the targeted review

This review will evaluate the extent to which ARACIS continues to fulfil the requirements of the ESG. The targeted review aims to place more focus on those parts that require attention and provide sufficient information to support ARACIS's application to EQAR.

The review will be further used as part of the agency's renewal of membership in ENQA.

2.1 Focus areas

- A) Standards with a partial compliance conclusion in the Register Committee's last renewal decision:
 - a. Standard 2.7 – Complaints and appeals;
 - b. Standard 3.6 – Internal quality assurance and professional conduct;
- B) Standards 2.1 to 2.7 for the following activities:
 - a. periodic external evaluation of institutions organising doctoral study programmes (IOSUD);
 - b. periodic external evaluation of doctoral domains (DSD);
 - c. evaluation for the establishment of a new doctoral study domain

Attention should be particularly given to the following issues:

- How the agency ensures consistent decision making given the different approaches in the external QA of doctoral studies (ESG 2.5)
- C) Standards affected by other types of substantive changes:
 - a. Does not apply
 - D) ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance, in particular how ARACIS ensures sufficient coverage of ESG Part 1 in its evaluation of doctoral procedures (ESG 2.1).
 - E) Selected enhancement area: ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose
 - F) Other matters regarding ESG compliance that come up during the targeted review and that may affect the agency's compliance with the ESG (if any).

⁹ See EQAR's policy on reporting changes <https://www.eqar.eu/register/guide-for-agencies/reporting-and-renewal/>

These issues should be investigated by the review panel as far as possible, providing an analysis and conclusion on the ESG standard(s) concerned.

3. The review process

The review will be conducted in line with the requirements of *the EQAR Procedures for Applications* and *the Policy on Targeted Reviews*, and following the methodology described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Agreement on the Terms of Reference between EQAR, ARACIS and The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA);
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA);
- Self-assessment by ARACIS including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to ARACIS;
- Preparation and completion of the final review report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final review report by ENQA's Agency Review Committee;
- Analysis of the final review report and decision-making by the EQAR Register Committee;
- Decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board;
- Attendance to the online follow-up seminar.

3.1 Independence of the review coordinator

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has not provided remunerated (e.g. consultancy) or unremunerated services to ARACIS during the past 5 years, and conversely ARACIS has not provided any remunerated or unremunerated services to The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

3.2 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members including an academic employed by a higher education institution, a student member and one other expert. At least one of the four members is from another country.

At least one panel member should be a quality assurance professional that is currently employed by a QA agency and has been engaged in quality assurance within the past five years. When requested by the agency under review or when considered particularly pertinent, other stakeholders (for example, a representative of the labour market) may be included in addition to the four panel members. In this case, an additional fee is charged to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses.

One of the members serves as the chair of the review panel, and one as the review secretary. 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. At least two panel members come from outside the national system of the agency under review (if relevant).

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Review Coordinator (an ENQA staff member) who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements are met throughout the process. The Review Coordinator 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 the agency with the proposed panel composition and the curricula vitae of the panel members to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The reviewers will have to agree to a non-conflict of interest statement that is incorporated in their contract for the review of this agency.

Once appointed, The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) will inform EQAR about the appointed panel members.

3.3 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 includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;

The self-assessment report is expected to contain:

- a description of the self-assessment process and the production of the SAR;
- a description of changes occurred within the agency since the last full review, including any eventual changes in the higher education system and quality assurance system in which the agency predominantly operates, the agency's structure, funding, its list of external quality assurance activities within the scope of the ESG, as well as the changes in the agency's quality assurance activities abroad (where relevant);
- a section that addresses the focus areas of the review, including standards that were considered to be partially compliant with the ESG in the last full review as well as ESG 2.1 and one self-selected ESG standard for enhancement (see 2.1 Focus areas);
- a SWOT analysis of the agency as a whole;
- for each of the individual standards enlisted above (see section 2) a consideration of how the agency has addressed the recommendations as noted in the previous EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal (if applicable).

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 continues to meet the ESG and thus the requirements for EQAR registration.

The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat, which has two weeks to carry out a screening. The purpose of a screening 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 rather whether or not the necessary information, as outlined in the *Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews*, is present. If 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 ask for a revised version within two weeks.

The final version of the agency's self-assessment report is then submitted to the review panel a minimum of eight weeks prior to the site visit. The agency publishes the completed SAR on its website and sends the link to ENQA. ENQA will publish this link on its website as well.

3.4 A site visit by the review panel

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule considering the aspects included under the focus area (as defined under point 2.1 of the Terms of Reference).

The schedule will include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit. 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 site visit should enable the review panel to explore how the agency has addressed the standards where it has been found to be partially compliant (if the case), aspects of substantive change, consideration of internal quality assurance (ESG 2.1) and the self-selected ESG standard(s) for enhancement. The panel will include extra time during the site-visit to address any other arising issues (if the case) that might have an impact on the agency's compliance with the ESG.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency.

Prior to the physical site visit, the panel attends a joint briefing call between the panel, The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and EQAR to clarify the review expectations and address any possible arising matters.

In advance of the site visit (at least two weeks before the site visit), the panel will organise an obligatory online meeting with the agency. This meeting is held to ensure that the panel reaches a sufficient understanding of:

- The specific national/legal context in which the agency operates;
- The specific quality assurance system to which the agency belongs;
- The key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities.

3.5 Preparation and completion of the final review report

The review report will be drafted in consultation with all review panel members and correspond to the purpose and scope of the review as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. In particular, it will provide a clear rationale for its findings concerning each ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG* to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR¹⁰.

The external report will present the facts and analysis reflecting the reality at the time of review. This will form the main basis for the Register Committee's decision making.

A draft will first be submitted to the ENQA Review Coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity, and language. After panel has considered coordinator's feedback, the report will go to the agency for comment on factual accuracy. If ARACIS chooses to provide a position 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 and submit the document for scrutiny to ENQA's Agency Review Committee and then to EQAR along with the remaining application documents (self-evaluation report, Declaration of Honour, statement to review report-if applicable). The report is to be finalised normally within 2-4 months of the site visit and will normally not exceed 30 pages in length. All panel will sign off on the final version of the external review report. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) will provide to ARACIS the [Declaration of Honour](#) together with the final report.

4. Publication and use of the report

ARACIS will receive the expert panel's report and publish it on its website once the ENQA Agency Review Committee has validated the report. Prior to the final validation of the report, the ENQA Agency Review Committee may request additional (documentary) evidence or clarification from the review panel, review coordinator or the agency if needed. The review report will be published on ENQA website regardless of the review outcome. The report will also be published on the EQAR website together with the decision on registration, regardless of the outcome.

ENQA will retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the review panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, will be vested in ENQA. In the case of an unsuccessful application to EQAR, the report may also be used by the ENQA Board to reach a conclusion on whether the agency can be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA.

5. Decision-making on EQAR registration and ENQA membership

The agency will submit the review report via email to EQAR before expiry of the agency's registration on EQAR. The agency will also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF

¹⁰ See here: <https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>

format), the Declaration of Honour and any other relevant documents to the application to EQAR (i.e. annexes, statement to the review report).

EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency's application at its Register Committee meeting in autumn 2023. The Register Committee's final judgement on the agency's compliance with the ESG as a whole can either be substantially compliant (approval of the application) or not substantially compliant (rejection of the application). In case of a positive decision (substantially compliant with the ESG), the registration is renewed for a further five years (from the date of the review report).

The decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board will take place after EQAR Register Committee decision.

To apply for ENQA membership, the agency is requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which the agency expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be considered by the Board together with the confirmation of EQAR listing when deciding on the agency's membership. Should the agency not be granted the registration in EQAR or the registration is not renewed, the decision on ENQA membership will be taken based on the final review report, the application letter, and the statement from the Agency Review Committee. The decision on membership will be published on ENQA's website.

6. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	November 2022
Appointment of review panel members	November 2022
Self-assessment report (SAR) completed by ARACIS	9 December 2022
Screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator	December 2022
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	January 2023
Briefing of review panel members	February 2023
Review panel site visit	March 2023
Submission of the draft review report to ENQA Review Coordinator	April 2023
Factual check of the review report by the ARACIS	May 2023
Statement of ARACIS to review panel (if applicable)	May 2023
Submission of review report to The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)	June 2023
Validation of the review report by the Agency Review Committee	September 2023
EQAR Register Committee meeting and decision on the application by ARACIS	Autumn 2023

