



A short description of quality assurance system in Romania

The structure of higher education in Romania is regulated by the Law of National Education. The Romanian Higher Education System is coordinated by the Ministry of National Education. According to the Law of National Education, the Romanian Higher Education System includes all the accredited higher education institutions: universities, academies, institutes, higher education schools and others. Higher education institutions may be public or private, or confessional institutions.

In the academic year 2016-2017, there are 101 accredited higher education institutions (HEIs), of which 55 are state HEIs and 46 private HEIs. Romania participates in the Bologna Process since its launching in 1999 and the national legislative framework has been adapted since then in order to meet the requirements of the European Higher Education Area.

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

- 1st 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 programs, such as Law and Engineering;
- EU regulated professions, with long programs (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;
- 2nd cycle, Master's degree ("Masterat" - level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework) – up to 2 study years (60 – 120 ECTS);
- 3rd cycle, Doctoral studies ("Doctorat" - level 8 of the European Qualifications Framework) – 3 study years. For the 3rd cycle, the ECTS workload is decided by the universities. Full-time or part-time doctoral studies correspond to 3 years' work time.

Quality Assurance in education – including higher education – is regulated by Law, as "primary legislation". Subsequent regulation, as "secondary", includes Government Decisions, which approve the **Methodology** and other aspects related to the structure of HE system. Other "secondary regulation", based on ARACIS QA external evaluations, is approved, either by Government Decisions, such as the annual approval of the structure of the study programs in Romanian HEIs (i.e. for the academic year 2016-2017), or by Ministerial Orders. HEIs are fully in charge and responsible for their Internal QA processes and activity, according to ESG and the national legislation.

According to Romanian Law no. 87/2006, accreditation is a legal procedure which includes two key steps: **provisional authorization** and **accreditation**. If an education provider intends to establish a new HEI or study program, corresponding to a specific qualification, the education provider needs to undertake a process of external evaluation. This process allows for provisional authorization, and then for accreditation, after successfully operating the study program for a number of years. For example, for accreditation of study programs at the bachelor degree level, the interval between the graduation of the first cohort of students and



the application for accreditation of the study program should not exceed two years; while accreditation of HEIs can be undertaken after the accreditation of three study programs.

Assurance of the quality of the educational process in higher education is accomplished through periodic evaluations. Evaluation is performed at the level of the university specialisations and/or at the level of institutional structures. The evaluation at the level of institutional structures is carried out for departments, colleges, faculties and/or higher education institutions. The evaluation process is accomplished through internal evaluation, within the respective higher education institution, and external evaluation accomplished by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), according to the law. Evaluation commissions by reference domain, profile and/or specialisation are established as permanent organisms subordinated to the ARACIS in order to effectively carry out the external evaluation of the higher education institution.

The academic evaluation and the accreditation procedure are based on an assembly of general criteria and obligatory standards. The criteria refer to the fundamental organising and functioning domains specific to higher education: teaching staff, educational content, material basis, research activity, financial activity, and institutional, administrative and management structures. The standards refer to each criterion and specify the minimum obligatory levels during the evaluation and accreditation period (these levels are differentiated for the provisory functioning period and for the period subsequent establishment through the law). The general criteria and the basic obligatory standards are set by the law whilst the specific criteria by reference domain and specialisation of study are established by the evaluation commissions subordinated to ARACIS.

The authorisation for provisory functioning is withdrawn through Government Decision for the specialisations found below the national standards, as proved by the negative evaluation reports of the ARACIS. The respective specialisations enter a liquidation procedure starting with the first year of study. In case of the accredited higher education institutions a negative report of the ARACIS for specialisations determine first a warning from the Ministry of National Education. In case that after one year a second negative report is issued following a second evaluation, the respective specialisation enters with the first year of study in liquidation procedure through Ministerial Order.

The Law provides the framework regarding quality assurance in education at all levels. The concept of quality assurance is defined, together with the concept and understanding/meaning of the term "accreditation" in Romanian education and, particularly, in higher education. The Law was approved by the Romanian Parliament, its provision being in accordance with the ESG. Subsequent amendments of the Law, referring to quality assurance and ARACIS, aimed at strengthening the independence of the agency in its decisions taking process, organization and funding. Modifications of the Law allowed ARACIS to include students and other stakeholders as members of the Council and to adapt the number of Council members and staffing to the volume of agency activity.



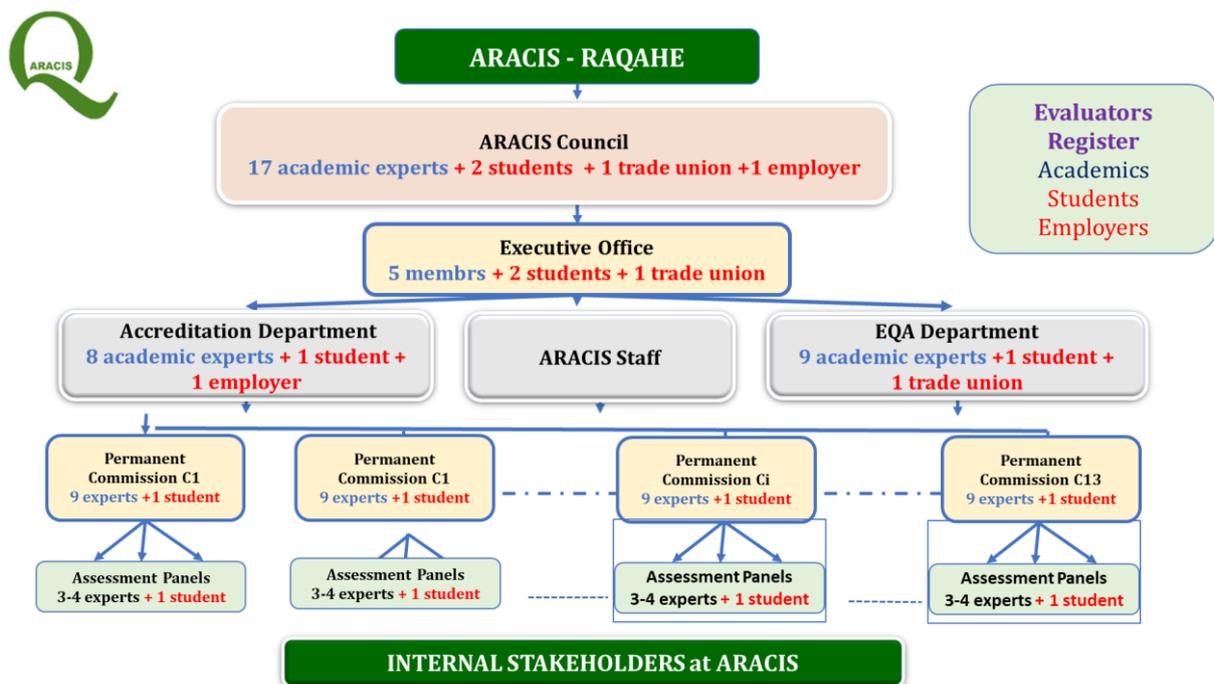
A short description of the responsibilities and structure of The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is known by the Romanian acronym ARACIS which stands (in Romanian) for „**Agenția Română pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior**”, referred to thereafter as **ARACIS / the Agency**. The Agency started to function in 2005, being instituted by Law. According to the Law – Art.16 (1), “ARACIS is an autonomous public institution of national interest, a legal entity with own income and expenses budget”.

At present, the Agency is led by a Council of 21 members. Rectors and any other persons holding high official positions within the Presidency, the Government or the Parliament cannot be members of the Council of ARACIS, in order to ensure complete independence and to avoid political influence.

By Law, five of the Council members are Executive Board members, which is the structure that has to ensure the day-to-day management routine of the Agency. Two of the five members of the Executive Board, the President of the Council and the Vice-president, are elected by their peers via a secret voting procedure. The other three members of the Board are appointed by the President and serve as Directors of Departments (Accreditation and External Quality Evaluation, respectively) and Secretary General. The present organizational structure of the agency is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1



The importance of ARACIS, as an institution and activities, in the Romanian normative HE context, is probably better underlined by quoting the Law - Art. 17 (1), b): “to assess based on



standards and methodology approved by Government Decisions, upon request or of its own initiative, and to propose the authorization, respectively the accreditation of higher education providers and their study programs. On the basis of the accreditation reports, the Ministry of Education and Research elaborates the normative acts for the establishment of higher education structures”.

The QA external evaluation activities of the agency are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

QA external evaluation activities of the agency: synopsis		
Type of external evaluation	Activity	Comments
1. Provisional authorizing to operate	1.1 Study programs (SPs) (Bachelor/"Licență") 1.2 HE institutions	Performed on a regular basis, as per legal provisions
2. Accreditation	2.1 Study programs (Bachelor/"Licență"; Master) 2.2 HE institutions 2.3 Master studies domains	
3. Periodic (cyclical) evaluation	3.1 Study programs (Bachelor/"Licență"; Master) 3.2 HE institutions 3.3 Master studies domains	
4. EUR-ACE Awarding Label	4. Evaluation of Engineering Study Programs	<i>Occasional activity</i> , upon request/contract with Romanian HEIs. EUR-ACE Label awarded by ARACIS, according to agreement with ENAEE
5. International/cross-border evaluation	5. Evaluation of 17 Law Study Programs in R. of Moldova	<i>Occasional activity</i> performed in R. of Moldova, upon request/contract based. ARACIS evaluation considered also provisions of legislation in the country where the study programs were offered. Note: based on ARACIS Report Accreditation/Reaccreditation was granted as per foreign partner country legislation

An important activity of the agency, with significant relevance for the HEIs and the stakeholders is, since 2009, drafting and publishing system-wide and thematic analyzes. Several such documents, under the title “Quality Barometer”, were published in 2009 and 2010. The most recent issue was published in Romanian in 2015 and was translated in English in 2016¹. In accordance with the ESG 2015, the Quality Barometer includes a thematic analysis on the perception of ARACIS activity with the stakeholders.

Other activity at national level include: drafting proposals for adapting methodologies to new requirements of the Law of national education - 2011; co-operation with the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC) and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), co-operation with the National Rector’s Council, with HE institutions, student federations and community of employers.

¹ Quality Barometer 2016: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/2017/Quality_Barometer_2016_EN.rar