

ENQA coordinated review of ARACIS, March 2009

Report of the panel (final version 18 May 2009)

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1. Executive summary

A review panel consisting of:

- Prof. György Bazsa (Hungarian Accreditation Committee Hungary, chairman),
- Obe de Vries (Inspectorate of Education, the Netherlands, secretary),
- Prof. Jacques Willems (Ghent University, Belgium),
- Stefan Delplace (EURASHE nomination¹, Belgium) and
- Koen Geven (ESU nomination, the Netherlands)

carried out a review of ARACIS, with the aim to evaluate ARACIS against ENQA membership criteria. The review was carried out by studying an ARACIS self evaluation report (SER) and additional documents, and by a site visit (March 2009). In the course of the review preliminary questions (May 2007) were taken into consideration too, but there were no additional terms of reference. The conclusions of the review panel are as follows:

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Sub-score	Final Score
ESG 3.1, 3.3 / ENQA criterion 1: Activities			FC
ESG Section 2 / ENQA criterion 1: External quality assurance processes			SC
	ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures	sc	
	ESG 2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes	fc	
	ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions	sc	
	ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose	sc	
	ESG 2.5 Reporting	sc	
	ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures	sc	
	ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews	fc	
	ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis	pc	
ESG 3.2 / ENQA criterion 2: Official status			FC
ESG 3.4 / ENQA criterion 3: Resources			SC
ESG 3.5 / ENQA criterion 4: Mission statement			SC
ESG 3.6 / ENQA criterion 5: Independence			FC
ESG 3.7 / ENQA criterion 6: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members			SC
ESG 3.8 / ENQA criterion 7: Accountability procedures			SC
ENQA Criterion 8: Miscellaneous			FC

NB: FC/fc (fully compliant) and SC/sc (substantially compliant) represent mainly positive opinions of the panel; PC/pc (partly or partially compliant) and NC/nc (non compliant) represent more or less negative opinions of the panel.

The review panel concludes that ARACIS is **substantially compliant** with the requirements set for the ENQA-membership.

¹ For Glossary and acronyms see Annexe 1

2. Introduction

This is the report of the review of ARACIS undertaken in March, 2009 for the purpose of investigating whether the agency meets the criteria for Full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The membership provisions are listed in Annexe 7 to the report. Generally, the panel has been impressed with the positive role that ARACIS plays in the Romanian higher education system. By promoting quality assurance as well as making it a reality, it is a vital institution to provide a needed impetus for quality education. At the same time however, the agency can improve its ways of working to carry out its mission. Hence, this report should be read in such a light. While the panel is generally positive, it tries to identify as many roads to improvement as possible, leaving the freedom to ARACIS and the wider Romanian society to further use and improve quality assurance for the benefit of all.

2.1 Background and outline of the review process

ENQA's regulations require all Full member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they fulfil the membership provisions. A review using the same procedures is required for new full membership applications, including applications of candidate members.

In November 2004, the General Assembly of ENQA agreed that the third part of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) should be incorporated into the membership provisions of its regulations. Substantial compliance with the ESG thus became the principal criterion for Full membership of ENQA. The ESG were subsequently adopted at the Bergen ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in 2005.

The third part of the ESG covers the cyclical external review of quality assurance and accreditation agencies. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, external cyclical reviews for ENQA membership purposes are normally conducted on a national level and initiated by national authorities in a EHEA State, but carried out independently from them. However, external reviews can also be coordinated by ENQA (or by another non-national or international organisation) if they cannot be nationally organised. This may be the case, for instance, when no suitable or willing national body can be found to coordinate the review. In that event, ENQA plays an active role in the organisation of the review, being directly involved as coordinator, whereas, in the case of national reviews, it is only kept informed of progress throughout the whole process.

The ENQA-coordinated review of ARACIS was conducted in line with the process described in *Guidelines for national reviews of ENQA member agencies* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The review panel for the external review of ARACIS was composed of the following members:

Prof. György Bazsa, Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC), Hungary (Chairman)
Obe de Vries, Inspector of Education, the Netherlands (Secretary)
Prof. Jacques Willems, Honorary rector, Ghent University, Belgium
Stefan Delplace, Secretary General EURASHE, Belgium
Koen Geven, Former Chairperson European Students' Union (ESU), the Netherlands.

In 2007 ARACIS applied for candidate membership of ENQA, which was granted subsequently. In addition to fulfilling the external review requirement of ENQA membership, the present review of ARACIS had the following purpose: to evaluate ARACIS against the membership criteria of ENQA.

ARACIS produced a self evaluation report which provided a substantial portion of the evidence that the panel used to form its conclusions. In a supplement to the SER ARACIS provided answers on the questions asked by the ENQA Board in May 2007 (See Annexe 2). When preparing for the site visit the review panel studied a number of documents, some of which are listed in Annexe 3. During the site visit some more documents were handed over. Among others the panel made use of the results of a Romanian experts review (2007) and two external reviews, one by EUA (2008) and one by ESU (2008). In particular the last two reports contained descriptions as regards specific ESG Standards which in most respects the panel could validate during the interviews and quote in the present report. For the judgements in the EUA and ESU reviews see Annexe 4 and 5.

The panel conducted a site-visit in March 2009 to validate fully the self evaluation and clarify any points at issue. For the full programme see Annexe 6. Further to the site visit ARACIS answered a specific question on ESG-criterion 2.8 (System-wide analysis) in a written statement.

Finally, the review panel produced the present final report on the basis of the self evaluation report, site-visit and its findings. In doing so it provided an opportunity for ARACIS to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report. The review panel confirms and wishes to express its appreciation to ARACIS that it was given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review, except one key person who was the Minister of Education, the president of Romanian Rectors' Conference and rector of the Bucharest Technical University at the time of the visit, a situation which in the panel's opinion is unusual in European practice.

2.2 The Romanian Higher Education System

Introduction

In this section a short overview of the recent history of the Romanian Higher Education System is presented, mainly based on data from the self evaluation report. Three developments since 1990 are distinguished:

- distancing from the communist past
- rapid expansion of number of HEIs and students
- introduction Bologna, decrease HEIs, further increase students.

2.2.1 Distancing from the communist past

The first development was one of distancing the system and HEIs from their communist past. Key issues were the reconstruction of curricula, the assertion of university autonomy and academic freedom, and initiatives to accommodate increasing numbers of students. Academic entrepreneurs established new private HEIs and new study programmes so that the increasing demand for higher education was matched by an increasing institutional supply, mostly in law, economics, social and political sciences and humanities. The focus of legislative reform in the early stage of transition was on abrogating all those legal provisions which were considered as being

of a communist type, followed in 1993 by the adoption of a law on accreditation, in 1995 by instituting a new legislative basis of education (The Law of Education 84/1995 and in 1997 the Law for the Statute of the Educational Personnel 128/1997). This legal framework is still in place, although some of its provisions were progressively changed and/or complemented with new ones, particularly in 2004 when the Bologna principles, objectives and structures were legally promoted and the new law on accreditation in 2005 both for secondary and higher education.

2.2.2 Rapid expansion of number of HEIs and students

The second development is the rapid expansion of the system of HEI with regard to both the number of HEIs and students. The number of both private and public HEIs increased fourfold in the period 1990-2000, thus reaching a total number of 133 HEIs in 2000, out of which 57 were state funded and 76 private. Intermediary bodies such as the National Higher Education Funding Council, National Higher Education Research Council, CNEEA, National Rectors Council, Council of Academic Staff Attestation, Council for Diploma Recognition and Equivalence, started to act as ministerial advisory bodies. These bodies were composed of academics and other university and employers representatives. The public funding of higher education changed by introducing a formula based system which took the student as reference and the distinction between the basic / core funding (e.g. salaries and current expenses) and complementary funding (e.g. capital investments, research funds, scholarships and the student support etc.).

2.2.3 Introduction Bologna, decrease HEIs, further increase students

The Bologna Process principles have been legally promoted since 2004 so that in 2008 the first generation of Bologna students graduated with a Bachelor ("Licenta") degree. Although the student numbers continued to increase, the number of HEIs started to decrease, mostly because 33 HEIs were denied by Government Decision the authorization to function because of non-compliance with the quality standards. Some other HEIs decided to merge or cease their functioning.

Over the years the HEIs have developed into today's figures: 56 accredited State universities, 31 accredited private universities and 21 provisionally authorised, private universities. There is a uniformity of mission statements. All HEIs are universities, and all universities are teaching and research institutions, though their balance between research and teaching outcomes is very different. One third of the universities have no doctoral programmes. No HEIs identify themselves as giving a purely professional education or as serving solely a region or a community, asserting instead their national and indeed European vocation, though at least some of them would best serve local needs.

2.2.4 Some remarks by the panel

The review panel agreed on the description given above as a fair picture of the recent past of HE in Romania. Further to the description above the review panel noted that the number of students indeed increased in recent years with big jumps (Source: EUROSTAT, 13 March 2009):

2004: 685.700

2005: 738.600

2006: 835.000

Meanwhile the participation in life long learning (25-64 old) was in 2004 1.6%, against an average for all EU countries of 12,5% (Source: The World Bank, Romania Education Policy Note, 2007). These figures should be seen against a background of

an over-all population in Romania (2007) of approximately 22 million (Source: EVD-factsheet Romania, 6 March 2009).

Given these figures the panel kept in mind that certain features of the Romanian HE-system would deserve close attention, e.g. how quality assurance processes deal with the variety in HEI-institutions (benchmarking?). Also the review panel wondered how the competition between public and private universities would affect the need for regional development and for looking after the local community. In connection with this the lack of public interest in participating in life long learning and the appearance and role of providers of distance learning courses, representing a large percentage of the student population in some of the private universities, drew the attention of the review panel. The panel couldn't get a clear picture of the mission, function, competencies and interrelation of the in § 2.2.2 mentioned (six) intermediate bodies (today ARACIS instead of CNEAA) including the Ministry of education, culture and youth.

2.3 Quality assurance in HE in Romania

In this section a short overview is presented concerning the development of quality assurance in HE in Romania in the last two decades, mainly based on data from the SER. These two decades are clearly divided into the period up to 2005 and the one from 2005 onwards.

2.3.1 The start: 1990 – 2005

Following the support of the World Bank the public authorities drafted a law on accreditation of higher education institutions, which was adopted in 1993. This law empowered a National Council on Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) to provisionally authorize (license) and then accredit higher education institutions. Almost all standards considered in the processes were of an input type (i.e. teaching staff, teaching space, teaching facilities, library, curriculum design, etc.) and they were formulated in quantitative terms (i.e. how many teaching staff for how many students? how many volumes in the library? how many hours of contact teaching per week? what teaching load per staff member? etc.). Initially private higher education institutions (HEIs) reacted with a strong reluctance to the enforced legal provisions of 1993, accusing the public authorities of trying to prevent private initiatives and academic entrepreneurship for ideological reasons. They subsequently discovered various ways of complying with the input standards and over about a ten year period 27 private but also two new state HEIs were accredited.

2.3.2 ARACIS: 2005 - now

In 2005 a new Ordinance on Quality Assurance in Higher Education was drafted. In order to have a unitary and comprehensive approach to quality, the Law of 2005 provides for a general framework that is valid for both pre-university and university education. Two agencies would correspond to the two basic levels of education and were expected to co-operate closely: ARACIS, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Agenția Română pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior) and ARACIP (the Romanian agency responsible for quality assurance in the pre-university education). ARACIS would focus on quality assurance in higher education while also taking into consideration developments that are outlined by ARACIP. The overall approach to quality assurance is based on the same mechanisms and general standards, with an intended focus on learning outcomes. The National Qualifications Framework (which is currently being developed, but not yet

finalized) is meant to provide a hierarchy of qualifications and illustrate progressive learning paths.

ARACIS started to function in 2005, being instituted by the legal provisions of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 Regarding Quality Assurance in Education. It replaced CNEAA in all respects. In 2006 some provisions of the Ordinance were modified by the Parliament, the Ordinance was finally adopted by the Parliament and it became the Law nr. 87/2006. The Law provides the framework regarding quality assurance in education as a whole, while also referring specifically to quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. The Ordinance and then the Law were drafted and approved in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Bergen, 2005) adopted by the ministers responsible for higher education from the Bologna countries.

The process of implementing the provisions of this new Legislative Act has encountered resistance. More than 100 study programs, which were licensed (provisionally authorized) by applying the former input standards and criteria, had to be considered for accreditation by ARACIS because they were not further evaluated during the period of time when CNEAA was still functioning. Having originally been designed to comply with the inputs specifications under CNEAA, they suddenly had to comply with the new approaches put in place by the new Law. Because of the resistance of the initiators of such study programmes for almost a full year the implementation of the new Law was blocked by procedural mechanisms in the Parliament.

Since 2005 ARACIS has carried out activities, mainly under the following headings:

- Provisional authorisation study programme Licenta (Day course and Distance learning)
- Study programme accreditation Licenta (Day course and Distance learning)
- Study programme accreditation Master (Day course and Distance learning)
- Periodical evaluation
- Quality external evaluation.

The total number of decisions taken by ARACIS on accreditation or evaluation amounts to over 2500 (date 24.02.2009) (see also paragraph 3.1).

2.3.3 Some remarks by the panel

The panel agrees on the description given above is as a fair representation of the recent past of external quality assurance in Romanian HE. Given this description the panel was curious to know whether ARACIP and ARACIS indeed did maintain a lively interchange, which would contribute to a coherent education system (on this question however the panel didn't get a clear picture) and how the process of gradually enforcing HEIs to undergo evaluations of programmes and institutions (formerly approved by CENEAA) was taking place, in particular in view of the introduction of the Bologna-system in 2004. The bulk of ARACIS-activities have been concerned with accreditation of Master programmes. As it appeared many programmes of which the former CENEAA-accreditation was accepted had their first Licenta-graduates in 2007 or 2008. Still existing 4, 5 and 6 year Bachelor programmes are gradually fading out, although for some professions (e.g. medicine), stipulated in the Law, there are still so called integrated forms of university studies, the diplomas given being equivalent to a master's degree.

2.4 Some details of review process and review methodology

In preparation of the site-visit the panel held a telephone conference on January 15th under the guidance of ENQA vice-president Tibor Szántó, ENQA secretary general Emmi Helle and the ENQA-secretariat. After this telephone conference team members submitted questions to be asked during the site visit to the secretary in intensive e-mail correspondence between the team members. The secretary prepared a framework consisting of the ENQA-membership-criteria with, partly filled in with statements from the ARACIS self evaluation report and earlier reviews (EUA and ESU) and initial questions to be answered during the site visit. The questions were discussed during the first panel meeting in Bucharest, Sunday 1st March. Some of the questions were handed over to ARACIS to be answered in writing.

The site visit consisted of 2½ full days in which all in all 16 interviews were held. Interviewees consisted of - among others - the ARACIS council, representatives of various ARACIS-committees, the Ministry of Education, Senate, Rectors Conference, employers, students and teachers (see Annex 6 for a full list of interviewees). The last ½ day was used for clarification of remaining issues, internal panel discussion and briefing of the ARACIS-board by the panel. The site visit was well organized by ARACIS. Specific requests by the team were all followed up properly. The panel experienced lively discussion in all 16 interviews. The efficiency of the interviews was partly positively and partly negatively influenced by the fact that in many interviews translation (by an excellent interpreter) was necessary. On the one hand this slowed down the speed of the interviews; on the other hand this allowed the interviewees to give extensive comments in their own language, which increased their input.

As part of the review the panel invited also two other agencies (AIEQA and AEACE), claiming to carry out work in the field of quality assurance of Romanian higher education. AIEQA (Autonomous Institute for Education Quality Assurance) informed the panel that it was not interested in the interview as it deals with secondary education only. AEACE (Agenti de evaluare si Asigurare a Calitatii Educatiei) was interviewed by the panel. AEACE objects to the so-called "monopoly-position" of ARACIS, although Romanian law is clear on the exclusive role of ARACIS in carrying out accreditations and evaluations in higher education. However AEACE is still contesting the legal status of ARACIS. During the other interviews the panel found no support for AEACE as a QA-agency within the Romanian higher education system. Meanwhile the panel was informed by the ENQA-Board that ENQA has withdrawn the candidate-status of AEACE already some time ago, because of incorrect use of the ENQA-entitlements.

The panel also invited EDU-CER, which acts as a critical non-governmental organization. EDU-CER informed the panel about signs of what EDU-CER considers to be undue favouritism by ARACIS and other illnesses within the HE-QA-system and Romanian higher education at large. In establishing the validity of these claims the panel found that EDU-CER is not unknown by student-unions and teacher-unions, but that it had no support from them at all and that it is not taken very seriously by other actors in Romanian higher education either. This is not to say that there are no serious problems in the Romanian higher education system. In the aftermath of the site visit various press-reports popped up in which false diplomas and plagiarism were issues at stake. In the meantime the panel noticed that ARACIS has given full support to the Romanian agency CUC (Coalition for Clean Universities, Romania), which fights corruption in Romania. Apparently Romanian police is involved in taking action against the distribution of false diplomas.

3 Findings

Introduction

The ENQA Criteria for full membership of ENQA are linked to the ESG. The findings will be presented in the following order:

- 3.1 ESG 3.1, 3.3 / ENQA criterion 1: Activities
- 3.2 ESG Section 2 / ENQA criterion 1: External quality assurance processes
 - 3.2.1 ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures
 - 3.2.2 ESG 2.2 Development of external assurance processes
 - 3.2.3 ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions
 - 3.2.4 ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose
 - 3.2.5 ESG 2.5 Reporting
 - 3.2.6 ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures
 - 3.2.7 ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews
 - 3.2.8 ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis
 - 3.2.9 Over-all analysis, conclusion and recommendations on External quality assurance processes
- 3.3 ESG 3.2 / ENQA criterion 2: Official status
- 3.4 ESG 3.4 / ENQA criterion 3: Resources
- 3.5 ESG 3.5 / ENQA criterion 4: Mission statement
- 3.6 ESG 3.6 / ENQA criterion 5: Independence
- 3.7 ESG 3.7 / ENQA criterion 6: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members
- 3.8 ESG 3.8 / ENQA criterion 7: Accountability procedures
- 3.9 ENQA Criterion 8: Miscellaneous.

When covering these criteria in each section the following order is maintained:

- Standard
- Findings
- Analysis
- Conclusion
- Recommendation

In some cases these subparagraphs are preceded by a short introduction

3.1 ENQA Criterion 1 - Activities (ESG 3.1, 3.3)

Introduction

This criterion is a combination of two standards from the ESG: Standard 3.3 (Activities) and Standard 3.1 (External quality assurance of higher education). Standard 3.1 in itself is a composite standard, comprising 8 separate standards belonging to ESG Section 2. These 8 standards are covered in detail under the item 2: ESG Section 2 / ENQA criterion 1: External quality assurance processes.

Standard

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

The external quality assurance activities may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the member.

Findings

The SER (Annexe 6) makes clear that ARACIS performs the following activities on a regular basis:

1. accreditation of study programmes (Bachelor, Master) at different stages
2. external evaluation for accreditation of HEIs
3. periodic external evaluations (periodic reviews) for quality assurance in accredited HEIs

Requested evaluation	Total	Finalized			In progress	On waiting List
		Total	Of which approved	Of which Rejected		
Provisional authorisation study programme Licenta Day course	258	237	195	42	4	17
Provisional authorisation study programme Licenta LD/RF	31	29	23	6	1	1
Accreditation study programme Licenta Day course	249	216	201	15	8	25
Accreditation study programme Licenta LD/RF	28	12	12	-	13	3
Accreditation study programme Master Day Course	1655	1485	1419	66	54	116
Accreditation study programme Master LD	50	17	7	10	33	-
Periodic evaluation	223	191	190	1	7	25
DPPD	15	15	14	1	-	-
External evaluation for institutional accreditation	1	1	1	-	-	-
Quality external evaluation	9	6	6	-	3	-
Total	2519	2209	2068	141	123	187

Source: SER, annexe 6. (NB: LD/RF = Distance Learning/Reduced Learning, DPPD = Department for Teachers Formation)

ARACIS is by law the only QA agency in Romania which can accredit study-programmes and HEIs in Romania. Periodic external evaluation for quality assurance of accredited institutions may be undertaken by other agencies included in the European Register.

According to ARACIS one of the requirements within higher education in Romania is to accredit *all study programmes* until 2011. The cycle of *institutional external quality assurance* is a maximum of five years. *Periodic external quality assurance* provides an HEI with external feedback for further developing and enhancing its institutional quality. An accredited HEI or study programme is subject to periodic external evaluation (every five years). The *periodic external evaluation* of HEIs focuses on the HEI as an entity, and takes 20% of the study programmes as case examples. The decision which study programmes form part of this 20% is taken by the HEI and ARACIS jointly.

Apart from the regular activities, requests for provisional authorisation (= licensing, which is the first step) and for accreditation are carried out when asked for by an HEI. The external evaluation for accreditation is finalized with the yes/no judgement, which grants (or doesn't grant) the right to function as an HEI or study programme. This type of accreditation is needed when a provider establishes a new HEI or a new study programme.

In the interviews which the panel had with rectors, teacher-unions and student-unions it was made clear that the standards for external QA constitute a solid basis for professional and credible external QA of HE institutions. Internal quality assurance processes within institutions are evaluated by the ARACIS-panels according to the ARACIS standards, and thus form an integral part of the ARACIS-QA-processes. As yet evaluation of doctorate programmes is not carried out by ARACIS. The panel was informed by both the Ministry of education and members of the Senate that a complicated playing field is in place, in which various actors (first of all universities and institutes of the Romanian Academy of Sciences) carry out these programmes. The right of their accreditation belongs to the Commission for National Titles and Diplomas of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, not really fitting the 3 cycle Bologna system.

Analysis

From the overview given by ARACIS the panel concludes that ARACIS undertakes external QA-activities on a regular basis. Activities such as evaluation and accreditation are part of the core functions of ARACIS. Having said this the panel has found that the activities, although carried out on a regular basis, seem to have various names in various documents. Concepts like "periodic certification" and "periodic evaluation" are used, while (probably) pointing at the same activity. As was explained to the panel apparently one Romanian word covers all these phrases.

Having accepted the pre-Bologna status of study programmes as established by CNEAA, there is now a time limit (2011) within which all study-programmes and HEIs have to be accredited. However one problem is that the institutions can to some extent determine for themselves when they will supply applications (within the time-limit of 2011), so drawing a timetable is a problem. Only applications could be shown during the site visit, but no proper timetable.

Conclusion

Fully compliant

Recommendation

The panel recommends that issues around doctorate evaluation are clarified quickly. If Romania accepted the three cycle Bologna system the third cycle should belong to the universities as it is common in Europe. Also it is essential to prevent by all means that

HEIs in some way or another “escape” the regular accreditation system, e.g. by offering courses on a short time basis, and cancelling them before they are reviewed. A clear and accessible database including a public list of already licensed/accredited institutions and study programmes and a fixed timetable is needed. Legal provisions should be put in place which makes an escape from the accreditation requirements impossible.

3.2 ENQA criterion 1: External quality assurance processes (ESG Section 2)

Introduction

The 8 standards covered in this paragraph refer to ESG Section 2 / ENQA criterion 1: External quality assurance processes.

They are treated here separately in the paragraphs 3.2.1 - 3.2.8, with a final conclusion in paragraph 3.2.9.

3.2.1 ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

Standard

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Findings

The ARACIS external evaluation consists of 3 domains: Institutional capacity, educational effectiveness and quality management. Each HEI has a Commission in charge of QA, under the coordination of the Rector. The QA Commission should have policies, a database and specific internal QA procedures, while considering the ESG as an important reference for internal QA. However, according to the SER, the formal policies and procedures and the database are in some cases far from being operational and not mentally incorporated into the everyday activity of the HEIs. Moreover there is insufficient involvement of the professional world.

The ARACIS approach is meant to promote internal quality policies as part of cultural change. An example of this is the creation of a network of staff in Quality departments of universities, and the Code of good practice for quality departments, published in 2008. Also, it has developed projects to promote internal quality assurance within universities, supported by European funding.

Students participate in the management structure, but also act as a source of input. However the panel was informed by the students-unions that cooperation between management and students before and after ARACIS-evaluations may differ. Before an ARACIS site-visit cooperation being better than afterwards. To the panel this represents ‘old’ attitudes within the Romanian higher education system that need further attention.

Analysis

Internal quality assurance procedures of HE-institutions are gaining in relevance and effectiveness, but both the existing culture within universities (i.e. a ‘traditional’ hierarchical relation between professors and students), and the history of CNEAA (with an accreditation system without looking into internal QA) influence the present situation. QA-units within HEIs are still very small and deal with procedural and

administrative matters mainly. At the same time ARACIS encourages initiatives to structurally improve the position of these QA-units, and thus increase further development of quality culture and to include participation of all stakeholders, especially from the world of employment. The projects that ARACIS has undertaken with European funding should be taken as positive steps towards this situation.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

ARACIS should embark on further initiatives to strengthen a quality culture within HEIs and strengthening the relevant QA-units within HEIs, e.g. by promoting a PDCA-approach and by intensifying the quality-discussion within institutions.

3.2.2 ESG 2.2. Development of external quality assurance processes

Standard

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

Findings

Legislation, methodology and ARACIS guides create an extensive set of documentation on which the ARACIS QA-activities are built. Although the introduction of the new ARACIS-methodology went fairly quick, and discussion about standards and methodology was shorter than desired, by now aims and objectives are surely well-known, as all interviewees testified. Several meetings were held between 2006 and 2008 with university leadership and QA-staff of universities to reaffirm the aims and objectives.

During the interviews it was confirmed that in the initial phase of ARACIS' existence HEIs have contributed to the shape and content of future quality assurance processes. The formulation of a mission (see paragraph 3.5) has promoted further awareness of the aims and objectives of the external QA-system. Also employers, interviewed by the panel, showed their interest in the QA-system, but at the same time gave the impression that they contributed to ARACIS-QA-processes only marginally, and they hardly represented all important sectors of employment.

In discussions with the Rectors some critical remarks were made as to the amount of work that external QA-processes inflict upon HEIs. Sometimes processes are seen as too bureaucratic and formally standardised. Criteria do not always apply well to specific study programmes (e.g. the arts-study programmes). At the same time Rectors stated that in most cases they could find their way in standards and methodology and that they could make good use of the results of evaluation and accreditation reports. They also see the present processes as essential for integrating Romanian universities in the European Higher Education Area.

Analysis

Aims, objectives and methodologies of the external quality assurance procedures are well-published and clear, but to some extent also 'work in progress', the new mission statement being proof of this. There is need for further diversification and less

bureaucracy. Stakeholders are involved in further developing the establishment of aims and objectives, as well in the development of methodologies, but the role of employers in contributing to the discussion is not very strong yet. By and large ARACIS-procedures do not interfere much more than necessary with the normal work of HE institutions.

Conclusion

Fully compliant

Recommendation

ARACIS is recommended to diversify approaches wherever possible, taking into account the specific missions and profiles of the universities and to make better use of stakeholders such as employers.

3.2.3 ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions

Standard

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

Findings

Criteria for judgements are explicit and published widely. As the panel noted criteria are fairly uniform and not differentiated according to profiles of institutes and programmes. Also many criteria are of a technical and quantitative nature and in many cases not aimed at clarifying the extent to which learning outcomes are achieved. This means that "adequate" evidence is often understood as "detailed" evidence. In the discussion on criteria the panel had with representatives of HEIs it was argued that certain criteria (e.g. on quantitative requirements for teachers) were too stringent. In the set of criteria employability of graduates and the socio-economic justification of programmes plays no role. It is not obvious that criteria contribute clearly to the aims of enhancing a quality culture.

According to the SER and panel interviews with the chairmen of the permanent specialty commission and with members of evaluation teams various attempts are made to achieve consistency of judgements:

- in the case of programme-evaluation the panel of programme evaluators (3 members) one member of the visiting panel is member of the permanent specialty commission too. However, panels have no assistance from a professional secretary.
- on the basis of checklists filled in by the panel members a report is composed by the member of permanent specialty commission. There is no or little inter-panel member consultation about a draft-version of the report. The panel was informed that panel members sometimes never saw a report before it was sent to the HEI for comments.
- the report is then submitted to the permanent specialty commission in order to consider whether applied procedures were followed correctly, and whether there is consistency of documents with the conclusions of the report.
- the permanent specialty commission draws its own conclusions and recommendations and forwards the report to the Department of accreditation, which verifies and validates the procedure.
- at last the report is presented to the ARACIS Council, which examines the report, the processes and procedures and takes the final decision.

A good part of the evaluators are trained to ensure greater consistency. Knowledge of criteria is an important element during the training, and a condition to act as an evaluator. Recently, a process has been started to 'evaluate the evaluators'. Less clear is how expertise in the academic field and academic and professional authority as such play a role in the selection of evaluators. The academic members of the review teams seem to be selected in view of their knowledge of the ARACIS criteria, and not on the basis of their academic authority in their discipline. Also the panel noticed in more than one interview that there still is a variety of concepts of what quality and quality assurance is all about. However, there are trimester meetings with the external evaluators and with HEI rectors. International experts (mainly of Romanian origin) participate in all external quality assurance evaluation missions at institutional level, but not in programme evaluations. Students, recently admitted to panels for study programme evaluation, organize their own training and selection. Employers or professional bodies are not involved in the review teams.

Moderating decisions is part of the procedure set up by ARACIS. A procedure for sharing the decision with the HE-institution as well as an appeal procedure are in place. In institutional evaluation a similar procedure is followed, although the HE-institution has the possibility to react on draft-conclusions in an earlier phase. The appeal procedures are dealt with in Paragraph 3.9 (Miscellaneous). However it is worth mentioning that in the panel meetings with the ARACIS Council and the Consultative Committee and indeed in former external review reports varying numbers of appeal cases are mentioned.

Analysis

Criteria for assessing the quality of programmes and institutions are there but not always is clear how they are related to one of the main aims and objectives of ARACIS: promoting quality culture. Many criteria are still on the input side, and rather administrative. Because of the technical nature of criteria, it is fairly easy to establish evidence. This however should not be a reason to stick to this type of criteria when other perhaps less-technical criteria are asked for. Consistency in judgements is aimed at, but given the brief period in which ARACIS is in existence, this still needs further attention. The academic or professional authority of the review team members should be more a point of attention. Moderation and appeal procedures are in place.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

ARACIS should reconsider whether applied criteria are in line with the new mission statement. ARACIS should also take all necessary steps to further increase the consistency of judgements, e.g. by inter-panel consultation.

A process should be started to evaluate the extensive list of criteria, with a view to making them more qualitative and evaluative and learning outcomes oriented (as is mentioned below).

3.2.4 ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose

Standard

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

Findings

According to ARACIS its main objective is to assure and improve the quality of the Romanian higher education system. The main objective is to make Romanian diplomas trustworthy in Europe. In principle, the quality assurance system consisting of self evaluation reports, site visits, accreditation reports and decisions goes a long way in reaching this objective.

However, ARACIS has developed one standard methodology for licensing (provisional authorization), initial authorization and accreditation following initial licensing, quality assurance and improvement. The framework for these processes is much the same, whereas both the reason for the assessment (initial licensing, periodic evaluation etc.) and the objects (study programmes and institutions with a great deal of variation) call for more diverse approaches.

As regards the criteria for judgements it is already mentioned (paragraph 3.2.3) that many of them are of a technical nature. Failing them is accordingly judged as bad quality, whereas these indicators do not necessarily say much about the quality of learning outcomes.

As mentioned in the same paragraph evaluators are a key-element in the various assessment processes, but there is room for improvement. The extent to which truly international experts were involved has met with criticism by other review panels and the panel accepts this criticism. The panel noted also that the experts register in the English version of the website is empty. As already noticed in 3.2.2 the role of stakeholders, such as employers is very limited.

ARACIS stresses the point that improvement of the quality of Romanian HE is an important aim. For this matter the recently started EU-project meant to strengthen the quality assurance units in HEIs is a real chance for improvement. At the same time the panel found only few indications that up till now follow-up procedures for programmes and institutions are a major focus of activity for ARACIS.

Analysis

The QA-processes are generally speaking clear and they lead to clear decisions, but the overarching aim of improving quality and quality culture should be more dominant.

Uniformity of processes may have been a major concern in the first years of ARACIS' existence, now a tendency for appropriate diversification is needed. This applies also to the choice of indicators, which are only partially directed at improving quality and quality culture. The quality of evaluators is another point of concern, although the recent participation of students in the panels for study programmes is an important step forward. More influence is needed from stakeholders from the professional field (e.g. the world of enterprises).

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

ARACIS should work hard to strengthen a culture of improvement and enhancement. All elements of the QA-processes (indicators, self evaluation reports, evaluators etc.) should be geared to his aim. Stakeholders like employers should play a greater role in

this enterprise. Criteria and methodology need to be reviewed (and the bureaucratic content reduced) as soon as a possibility arises.

Students and professors could be trained partly in joint induction seminars, building trust and connections between the two groups.

3.2.5 ESG 2.5 Reporting

Standard

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

Findings

ARACIS-reporting is closely related to criteria for decision in reports of varying lengths. The study programme reports shown to the panel consisted of some 3 or 4 pages, with a rather technical summing-up of judgements on criteria. The reports on institutional evaluation are more elaborate booklets. According to ARACIS all reports are published on the ARACIS website, but over a period of time the panel has not been able to trace them. Not later than May of each year, the Ministry publishes the list of provisionally authorized and accredited HEIs and study programmes.

With regard to accreditation, including authorization, it is stipulated by Law that the report and decision should be first communicated to the HEI, which can contest them in certain degrees. This is done by ARACIS for both programme and institutional evaluation.

In the case of study programmes the report drafting process is a process in which the panel member who is member of the specialty commission, has a major task. As yet there is no expert support available within ARACIS technical staff for this task. As mentioned before there is no systematic procedure by which panel members can give their comments on a draft report written by the member of the specialty commission. It is not clear how the specialty commission, the accreditation council and the ARACIS Council may influence the decisions suggested by the findings of the panel.

Analysis

Generally speaking the study programme reports are readable, but not written for a general readership, including students. As far as the panel could see they are not readily accessible on the website. Descriptions, evidence, conclusions and recommendations are there, but analysis is not a strong point. There is no clear introduction to the public as to the nature of the reports. The panel also thinks that the reports do not sufficiently serve the purpose of quality improvement in the HEIs, and also are not really fit to get a clear picture of quality and QA in Romanian education (needed for the system-wide analysis discussed in paragraph 3.2.8).

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

There is room for improvement in report-writing, both as regards access (website) and character of the report, with a view to making them more useful to inform the education planning process. ARACIS should start quickly reviewing its policy on report writing.

3.2.6 ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures

Standard

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Findings

There are provisions for follow-up procedures, but the follow-up for study programmes with positive judgements is not clear, unlike the suggestion of ARACIS that improvement of quality is a major focus of its work. In the process of periodic evaluation of a HEI recommendations are to be followed up by a work plan. Later on (after at least one academic year) a summative evaluation focuses on how the recommendations have been implemented. With regard to accreditation, after provisional authorisation an annual monitoring process takes place. This follow-up is one of a long duration and aims for constant quality improvement.

In the case of a conditional accreditation decision, agreement on a follow-up plan is needed. In case of study programmes there is no follow-up procedure in power.

Universities marked as having "high trust" have no follow-up procedures.

The ARACIS council informed the panel that there is a plan to visit institutions after 3 year for a formal follow-up.

Analysis

There is a follow-up when formal recommendations are made. But good institutions and good study programmes have no formal follow-up. Given the short period of activity by ARACIS this is understandable, yet follow-up should soon come higher up the agenda, lest the mission of quality improvement loses its strength.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

Develop follow-up mechanisms for all study programmes and institutions. In particular the criteria for the periodical review of institutions or programmes should include a consideration of the way the findings and the recommendations of the previous review are dealt with, as an important element.

3.2.7 ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews

Standard

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not 'once in a lifetime'. It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

Findings

Accredited HEIs are legally subject to an external quality evaluation every five years (periodic review). All study programmes must have been accredited before 2011. Thereafter a new cycle will start with evaluations. The nature of this cycle is not clear yet. There is discussion on a shift to institutional accreditation with a selection of study programmes.

Analysis

In principle the system is meant to have cyclical reviews, but ARACIS' existence is too short to have this in place already.

Conclusion

Fully compliant

Recommendation

Take care with too early decisions on what the nature of the following cycle should consist of. International debate is still going on as to the balance between institutional and programme evaluations. In particular in the early stages of the development of a quality culture, as is the case in Romanian HE, there is no obvious reason to leave out forms of intervention that may be difficult to reintroduce again at a later stage.

3.2.8 ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis

Standard

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

Findings

The panel met with the consultative committee, which has played an active role in establishing the first independent review of ARACIS in 2007. Answering questions brought forward by the panel, the committee stressed the importance of distinguishing between discourse and reality in Romanian higher education. There is a lot everybody (or many) within the higher education system would want to achieve, but there is also a reality that is not always easy to handle and reach. So far the quality of the Romanian system of HE has never been subject of a summary report yet. Stakeholders told the panel is that is too short to tell whether the new Bologna-cycles work. The Ministry assured the panel that the law prescribes reviews after 3 years and that it will keep ARACIS to its legal obligation to produce a first overview in 2009. After the site visit the panel received additional information on a proposed system-wide analysis, which at first view looks ambitious.

Analysis

There are no reviews yet, but ARACIS is preparing a first system-wide analysis of Romanian higher education by the end of 2009. See also paragraph 3.2.5.

Conclusion

Partially compliant.

Recommendation

Make good use of all the data that are available within ARACIS and link them with system-wide data so as to get a solid data-base on (trends of the) quality of HE in Romania. Learning of international practice and comparison may be useful in this respect.

3.2.9 Over-all analysis, conclusion and recommendations on External quality assurance processes

Analysis

The panel concludes that ARACIS is substantially compliant on most of the criteria of Section 2 of the ESG-standards, and fully compliant on 2 of them. On one standard (System-wide analysis) the panel's conclusion is: partially compliant.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

See various standards

3.3 ENQA Criterion 2 - Official status (ESG 3.2)

Standard

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

Findings

In the SER is described that according to the Law, art 16(1), ARACIS is an autonomous public institution, of national interest, having a legal status and its own budget of revenues and expenses. It was established for the purposes (inter alia) of externally evaluating and quality assuring higher education providers who either currently or plan to award HE qualifications. Initial ARACIS headquarters, organizational structures and internal rules of functioning are proposed by ARACIS and adopted by Government Decision HG nr. 1257/2005. ARACIS' services are provided in three ways:

1. cooperating with HEIs to identify quality issues
2. responding to demands of national authorities with regard to quality assurance issues and external quality evaluation
3. responding to academic entrepreneurs who intend to establish new study-programmes and/or HEIs (through processes of accreditation).

The panel studied the law and agrees and validates the description in the SER. As the panel found out the Ministry issues the diplomas in higher education, but will not do so unless legal requirements like accreditation by ARACIS are fulfilled. If a HEI or study programme is not authorized diplomas are not legally valid.

As mentioned before the position of ARACIS is challenged by AEACE, but in the interviews the panel held with the Ministry, representatives of the Senate and the Rectors conference, no support for this challenge was found. Also in these interviews the interviewees stressed the point that at present for Romanian higher education it is best to have one agency only to carry out work in the field of accreditation etc.

Analysis

ARACIS is formally recognised by competent public authorities as an agency with responsibilities for external QA and has an established legal basis. It complies with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which it operates.

Conclusion

Fully compliant

Recommendation

None

3.4 ENQA Criterion 3 - Resources (ESG 3.4)

Standard

Agencies should have adequate and proportionate resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes, procedures and staff.

Findings

According to the SER ARACIS operates with five categories of human resources:

- 1) ARACIS council (15 members). Every 3 years 2/3 of the council's membership are renewed.
- 2) external evaluators (some 1500)
- 3) student evaluators (300 were trained, 60 participated in external evaluation panels)
- 4) professional staff, assisting the directors of the Accr. Dep. and the Ext. QA Dep. More staff will be hired for the quality assurance projects.
- 5) administrative staff (led by executive director)

The ARACIS staff amounts to some 35 members. In the discussion with ARACIS the panel found out that there are professional development activities, but these are not carried out systematically on the basis of a Plan-do-check-act-cycle. Proficiency in English is still generally weak. In the professional management of the office there is room for improvement, although an excuse may be that in the past 3 years of its existence ARACIS had a very large workload. In the workforce a research-function within the staff is not present. Apparently there is no room for professional secretarial assistance for review panels. The PR-function is not well developed yet.

There is no international secretariat just one responsible person within ARACIS.

According to ARACIS the number of staff and the way the organization is set up is stipulated by the Law. Once accepted at international level ARACIS will be able to increase the number of staff and to establish a new organization set-up.

In the SER ARACIS mentions that it relies on the following financial resources:

- 1) fee-income (for external evaluation, accreditation or quality assurance periodic evaluation)
- 2) contracts (e.g. with the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, when piloting the Methodology and/or external evaluation of quality assurance at institutional level)
- 3) participation in public competition (tenders, e.g. the EU-fund)

In 2007 60% of ARACIS income was fee income, the rest was made up by the Min. of ERY.

In terms of housing ARACIS uses office room rented from the Bucharest University. The building itself looks overcrowded and the entrance is not very welcoming. The website appears to face great difficulties and is often not functioning well or not at all accessible.

Analysis

ARACIS has adequate financial resources but in the domain of human resources a number of shortcomings may be noticed, e.g. in the professional management, the research function, support of review panels, PR and proficiency in English. Housing is more or less adequate but not inviting, the website is in some respects unreliable.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

ARACIS should work hard on issues for improvement such as permanent high-level professional management, the research function, support of review panels, PR and proficiency in English. A general manager, who is not a member of the council could be considered to this aim. Housing and website are in need of improvement too. The panel sees important advantages of a long term professional secretary general position.

3.5 ENQA Criterion 4 - Mission statement (ESG 3.5)

Standard

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

This statement should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statement should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statement is translated into a clear policy and management plan.

Findings

As is clearly described in the SER according to the renewed mission statement (October 2007) ARACIS intends to serve public interest through:

- realizing quality standards in study programmes and awards
- supporting the continuous enhancement of quality management (Bologna process).

Four principles underline ARACIS' work:

- cooperation (with HEIs and similar QA-agencies)
- information and transparency (informing stakeholders and the public, annual reviews, three year report on the quality of HE education)
- European visibility (cooperating with other European bodies)
- quality (constant review and enhancement of quality of its own activities)

Key activities of ARACIS are:

- setting standards (performance indicators, benchmarks)
- delivering services to the academic community that contribute to quality improvement
- providing information to the public (including students) on study programmes and HEIs.

As the panel found out that the detailed nature of the Romanian legislation implies that the work of ARACIS is directed more by legislative arrangements than by the mission statement. Interviewees from within the HEIs with whom the panel spoke stressed the many rules and regulations they had to adhere to, rather than the mission of ARACIS. However, most of them also agreed that ARACIS plays a very significant role in the development of a quality culture in higher education in Romania.

More in particular ARACIS is still searching for a balance between being a critical friend and being a judge making final decisions. In various interviews the recent past of the former agency CNEAA was discussed and identified as still having profound influence on the present activities of ARACIS and the perception thereof by HEIs.

Analysis

In the mission statement goals and objectives of ARACIS are clear and publicly available. The methods of work are clear too. However in terms of finding a balance between the various intentions laid out in the mission statement, processes of judgement (in various forms) seem to be more dominant than processes directed at enhancement. By stakeholders such as the HEIs the role of ARACIS is seen mostly as "judge". Given the past history of ARACIS' predecessor CNEAA, HEIs do not consider this as very surprising though. Detailed legislative rulings enforce this image. Lacking is a plan on how to move from this image of 'judge' to that of enhancer.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

Find a better balance between the various intentions as laid in the mission statement and make a development plan for the changes needed, based on a SWOT analysis. The mission statement should be further discussed in the council, in order to internalise its core messages.

3.6 ENQA Criterion 5 – Independence (ESG 3.6)

Standard

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Findings

ARACIS is an autonomous public institution of national interest. Under the Law ARACIS enjoys a high degree of independence in all its operational activities. Functionally, politically and financially ARACIS is independent from all stakeholders in higher education.

Within the ARACIS there are provisions that panel members are not connected to institutions which they review. The fact that one of the panel members is also a member of the Permanent Specialty Commission is by ARACIS seen as an efficient arrangement, and no questions are raised as to independent judgement.

Council members may not be Rector of a university during their term of office in the Council. But the panel found that Prorectors are not prevented from taking office. At the same time it is remarkable that there is a legal requirement that candidates for the Council be an academic staff member from a HEI. No representatives of other stakeholders are allowed to take office in the Council. Whereas this may promote the concept of "ARACIS as part and parcel of the HE-community", it also prevents the Council from systematically incorporating views from outside the HE-community. In this respect the panel noted that the Consultative committee (also called Advisory Board), which according to their own statement had met only twice or thrice so far, does not yet fulfil the watch-dog function that would be required. Moreover the composition and the mission of the Consultative Council are not clear to the review panel.

In various interviews the panel asked whether signs of favouritism were noticed by interviewees. One critic, EDU-CER, launched allegations in this respect but no other interviewees confirmed EDU-CER's view.

As noted before ARACIS rents housing facilities of one of Romania's universities, but - with the exception of EDU-CER - nobody with whom the panel spoke sees this as a breach of independence.

Analysis

ARACIS has an autonomous responsibility for its operations. Conclusions and recommendations in its reports are not influenced by third parties such as HE institutions, ministries or other stakeholders. Methods of work, e.g. the appointment of panel members ensure independence of judgements. The final decisions taken by ARACIS are not influenced by stakeholders and are the (sole) responsibility of the ARACIS.

Conclusion

Fully compliant

Recommendation

Although ARACIS - in the eyes of the panel - is fully compliant with the Standard on Independence, the panel feels that the present situation could lead to a kind of isolation from society. Therefore the panel offers a few recommendations to widen the scope of the ARACIS board:

- all those responsible for policymaking on Romanian HE should reconsider the legal requirement that only members of HEIs may be part of the ARACIS Council . According to the panel's experience presence of "proper" non-academic Board members influences very positively the atmosphere of a Board, reducing the eventually appearing mutual academic "politeness" and introducing different approaches.
- ARACIS should clearly define the role, the composition and the appointment procedure of the members of the Consultative Committee, and consider how the role of the Consultative Committee could be strengthened.
- ARACIS should develop more formal links with stakeholders.
- Not only Rectors also Prorectors and Heads of QA departments should not be allowed to combine these functions with a term of office on the ARACIS Council.

3.7 ENQA Criterion 6 - External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members (ESG 3.7)

Standard

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal

consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

Findings

Process, domains, criteria, standards and performance indicators used by ARACIS in the external evaluations are defined in the Methodology (Government Decision nr 1418/2006) and its accompanying Guides. The panel has seen abundant proof of this. The process of evaluation includes:

- a self evaluation report by the provider
- an external evaluation by a panel of independent experts (including a student)
- drafting and publication of a report
- a follow-up procedure.

Main strategies in carrying out the evaluations are:

- negotiation by an ARACIS council member with the rector of an HEI on the calendar etc.
- selecting highly competent panel-members, avoiding conflicts or clubbing of interest
- evaluation with reference to predefined criteria and standards. NB: a key shortcoming is the overall weak academic culture of operating with learning outcomes.

Analysis

Many of the issues at stake as regards external quality assurance processes have been discussed in various paragraphs before. Summing up it is clear that processes, criteria and procedures are defined properly and publicly available. They include:

- self-assessment by HE-institution, or study programme
- assessment by group of experts. Students already took part in institutional evaluation; recently also students take part in the review panels for study programmes
- there are various activities and mechanisms to ensure that there is consistency in judgements by panels and decisions by the Council (selection and training of panel members, validation of judgements at various levels within the ARACIS-organization)
- there is an appeals procedure, carried out by the Consultative Committee
- reports are published, including decision and recommendations, however not easily available through the website or others means.

For ARACIS the issues at stake are the rigidity of the system, the limited participation of other stakeholders in Romanian society than representation of HEIs, the predominance of certifying minimum (numerical input) standards and the underdevelopment of enhancement activities, and more generally speaking the need for further professionalization of ARACIS staff and all participating in its activities.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

As described before.

3.8 ENQA Criterion 7 - Accountability procedures (ESG 3.8)

Standard

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;
2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
 - the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
 - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
 - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;
 - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years, which includes a report on its conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.

Findings

ARACIS operates within the requirements set by the Law. There are many rules and regulations which ARACIS has created to assure transparency of its work. There is an overall Code of Ethics and a Code of Confidentiality. The Code of Ethics does not differentiate between the actors in ARACIS and the actors in the HEIs, although in terms of e.g. independence the same requirements are clearly not possible. There are regulations for panel members so as not to review their own institution or study programme. There is an appeals procedure. ARACIS undergoes an annual external financial control by independent auditors.

According to the SER and confirmed in interviews during the site visit bureau-members meet weekly with staff representatives. Regular meetings with experts take place to provide feed-back. Likewise presidents of the specialty commissions, evaluators, student evaluators and universities provide regular feed-back. Bureau members and the Council remain in close contact with the Rectors Council, the Education Committees of Parliament and representatives of the Ministry of ERY. It is ARACIS intention to have at least every five years an external review (over the past 2 years ARACIS already had 3 other external reviews).

However, in the Council only members of HEIs are allowed, apart from the membership of two students, which has been established recently. A yearly report on activities and budget is not found on the website, nor is there a description of the internal quality assurance system within ARACIS. Although ARACIS subjected itself to various external reviews, and although there are positive examples of openness referring to former reviews, it occurred to the panel that ARACIS is not always open to

criticism, considering criticism sometimes as an attack on itself, instead of making use of it in improving operations,

Analysis

There is a considerable degree of accountability in ARACIS' work. Accountability-directed procedures include rules for no-conflict-of-interest mechanism of external experts and feedback mechanisms. Also external reviews are carried out frequently. The role of external stakeholders is however limited and the composition of the Council is too much based on representation of HEIs only. As mentioned before the role of the Consultative Committee is not yet very firm in terms of a watch-dog function. Also ARACIS own internal quality assurance system is underdeveloped. Openness to the outside world, in particular when there are critical remarks still has to be developed further. The appeals procedure exists, but could be more clearly described, making it more open for those under evaluation.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant

Recommendation

Although accountability is looked after in many respects, a further opening up of the work of ARACIS is desirable. In this process the clear descriptions and the implementation of an internal quality assurance system is essential. The Code of Ethics should distinguish between those involved in external evaluation and internal evaluation within institutions.

The annexe to the Code of Ethics, which the actors have to sign, should not consider signing the 'confidentiality' clause of the Code, but also the 'independence' clause.

3.9 ENQA Criterion 8 - Miscellaneous

Standard

- 8i: The Agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgements and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgements are formed by different groups.
- 8ii: If the Agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.
- 8iii: The Agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

Findings

In the interviews held with all relevant stakeholders the panel noticed that the work of ARACIS is generally appreciated highly and that ARACIS functions according to its principles. Problems arise in finding a balance between various principles (decisions vs enhancement), the move away from the former routine, established by CNEEA, the sheer workload of ARACIS and the need for further professionalisation. Decisions are reached in an orderly manner on the basis. The aim of consistency is taken seriously. One of the tasks of the Consultative Committee is to handle appeals against decisions by the ARACIS board.

ARACIS is very willing to play an active role in the EHEA, thereby contributing to the aims of ENQA. Proof of this is participation in many conferences held all over Europe,

active contribution the working group on QA of student-assessment and organization of a conference on Master-degrees, March 2009.

Analysis

As regards essential elements of the external quality assurance system (professionalism, consistency, transparency, appeals procedures) ARACIS has progressed rapidly over the past three years and has reached standards comparable with various other quality assurance agencies within the ENQA-membership and EHEA at large. There is still room for improvement, but given the willingness to be an active ENQA member this improvement is apt to be found in further participation in ENQA-activities.

Conclusion

Fully compliant

Recommendation

The experience gathered from various forms of ARACIS international activity should be systematically applied in its domestic function.

4 Additional Terms of Reference of the review

There were no additional terms of reference in this review, only a number of additional questions to be looked into. These questions are summarized in Annexe 2 and covered when dealing with the various standards as appropriate.

5 Conclusion

Introduction

In getting to grips with the situation in Romanian higher education and the external quality assurance conducted by ARACIS the panel realizes that history matters. The confusing situation in the early nineties, the unbalance created by societal choices between a regular democratic process and a “free-for-all-society”, the fervent attempts to address lag in development in many socio-economic sectors, education being one of them, are only some of the aspects of turmoil higher education has gone through over the past two decades.

New European systems and ideas in higher education like the introduction of the Bologna 3-cycle-system and the shift from quality assurance based on input-criteria to learning outcome criteria are two other factors, both reflected in the creation of ARACIS in 2005. In this respect the sheer expansion of the HE-education is in itself a risk to proper maintenance and enhancement of quality standards.

Even though the panel noticed broad commitment to the work of ARACIS with many of the stakeholders interviewed during the site visit, there were adverse statements too, pointing at the poor state of Romanian higher education, including a very modest position on the Shanghai-rating list. Also the low degree of participation in life-long learning is a case of particular concern, certainly in view of its prominent role in European policymaking within the framework of the Bologna reform. Given this background perspective the panel reaches the conclusions and recommendation as described in this paragraph.

5.1 Conclusion

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the Review Panel is of the opinion that, in the performance of its functions, ARACIS is not fully compliant with the *ENQA Membership Provisions*. The agency is, nonetheless, in the opinion of the Review Panel, **substantially compliant** with the requirements set for the ENQA-membership and therefore sufficiently compliant to justify full membership of ENQA.:

The criteria where **full compliance** is achieved are:

- ENQA criterion 1: (sub-criterion) Activities
- ENQA criterion 2: Official Status
- ENQA criterion 5: Independence
- ENQA Criterion 8: Miscellaneous.

The criteria where full compliance has not been achieved are:

- ENQA criterion 1: (sub-criterion) External quality assurance processes
- ENQA criterion 3: Resources
- ENQA criterion 4: Mission statement
- ENQA criterion 6: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members
- ENQA criterion 7: Accountability procedures.

On these criteria ARACIS is **substantially compliant** and ARACIS is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, to achieve full compliance with these criteria at the earliest opportunity.

A full list of the judgements of the panel is listed in the table hereafter.

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Sub-score	Final Score
ESG 3.1, 3.3 / ENQA criterion 1: Activities			FC
ESG Section 2 / ENQA criterion 1: External quality assurance processes			SC
	ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures	sc	
	ESG 2.2 Development of external assurance processes	fc	
	ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions	sc	
	ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose	sc	
	ESG 2.5 Reporting	sc	
	ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures	sc	
	ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews	fc	
	ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis	pc	
ESG 3.2 / ENQA criterion 2: Official status			FC
ESG 3.4 / ENQA criterion 3: Resources			SC
ESG 3.5 / ENQA criterion 4: Mission statement			SC
ESG 3.6 / ENQA criterion 5: Independence			FC
ESG 3.7 / ENQA criterion 6: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members			SC
ESG 3.8 / ENQA criterion 7: Accountability procedures			SC
ENQA Criterion 8: Miscellaneous			FC
Over-all conclusion			SC

NB: FC/fc (fully compliant) and SC/sc (substantially compliant) represent mainly positive opinions of the panel; PC/pc (partly or partially compliant) and NC/nc (non compliant) represent more or less negative opinions of the panel.

The panel wishes to express a word of thanks to ARACIS and ENQA for the support in the visit.

5.2 Recommendation

Specific recommendations to ARACIS are given on many of the standards discussed in this report. A more general recommendation is that - given the rapid developments in Romanian education and the risk of entrepreneurs considering quantity of students

more important than quality - it is vital that ARACIS keeps an open eye to developments in Romanian higher education and to the developments in the EHEA, whilst engaging itself as much as possible in open discussion with other stakeholders trying to involve all important stakeholders in its operation, and appreciating criticism as a further encouragement to do better. Whatever the level of performance or achievement, be it for an organisation or a HEI, there is always room for improvement.

6 Annexes

Annexe 1. Glossary of acronyms

AEACE	Agentia de Evaluare si Asigurare a Calitatii Educatiei
AIEQA	Autonomous Institute for Education Quality Assurance
ARACIP	Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Preuniversitar
ARACIS	(Agenția Română pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior (Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
CNEAA	National Council on Academic Evaluation and Accreditation
CUC	Coalition for clean Universities
EDU-CER	Non-governmental organization in Romania acting as a public critical voice
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
ESU	European Students' Union
EVD	International enterprise and cooperation, Netherlands
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution (e.g. University)
SER	Self evaluation report

Annexe 2. Additional questions asked by the ENQA-board

Questions put forward to ARACIS by the ENQA-board (letter 10 May 2007) in order to meet all the criteria for Full Membership.

- What are the human and financial resources available to the Agency?
- How is student involvement in the quality assurance processes ensured?
- How is the governing structure organised?
- What are the selection and appointment procedures for the expert panel members?
What is the composition of the panels?
- How is the Competition Commission appointed?
- How is the independence of the Council members from the HEIs effectively ensured?
- Is ARACIS's methodology defined and operated independently from the government?
(cf. "... the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, (...) are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments (....), ESG 3.6)
- What is the difference between "evaluation" and "review" in the activities of ARACIS?
- How are the reports made public?
- How is the quality policy of the Agency made public?
- What are the internal feedback mechanisms of the Agency? Are there any follow-up or improvement measures?
- Which were the sources used in drafting the Code of professional Ethics (it seems very similar to that of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee)?

Annexe 3 Some documents studied in preparation of the site visit

1. Special ENQA-ARACIS documents of this review

- 1.1 ENQA letter to ARACIS (07.07.2008)
- 1.2 ARACIS letter to ENQA (10.07.2008)
- 1.3 ENQA nomination letter to Prof. Bazsa (18.12.2008)
- 1.4 Agenda ARACIS – telephone briefing (2008)
- 1.5 ARACIS review team CV-s (2008)
- 1.6 ENQA letter to ARACIS 100507 (10.05.2007)
- 1.7 Contract ARACIS ENQA (27.11.2008)
- 1.8 Terms of reference ARACIS ENQA (27.11.2008)

2. Romanian HE background documents

- 2.1 A1 Ordinance 75 and Law 87 (2005-2006)
- 2.2 A9 Romanian education system (2008)
- 2.3 Tables 1, 2, 3 on Romanian HE (2008)
- 2.4 A2 CNEEA activity 1993-2004, statistics (1993-2004)
- 2.5 Romanian HEI-s (2009)
- 2.6 Full list of Bachelor Programmes (2008)
- 2.7 PhD in Romania

3. ARACIS' documents for ENQA evaluation

- 3.1 Self evaluation report (SER) of ARACIS (08.12.2008)
- 3.2 A3 Mission statement (current)
- 3.3 A4 Methology (2006)
- 3.4 Evaluation Guides for accreditation of:
 - A5 Guide I Study programmes (dd.11.2006)
 - A5 Guide II Institutions (dd.12.2006)
 - A5 Guide III HEIs and study programmes (dd.12.2006)
 - A5 Guide IV Teaching staff (current)
 - A5 Guide V Distance education (current)
- 3.5 A6 Programmes evaluated, statistics (18.12.2008)
- 3.6 A7 Action plan 2007-2009 for ARACIS internal QA (current)
- 3.7 A10 Code of ethics (current)
- 3.8 Specific aspects to be adressed by ARACIS (current)
- 3.9 ARACIS certificate (2007)

4. Reports in relation to ARACIS

- 4.1 A8 Monitoring Report of ARACIS (2007)
- 4.2 A11 EUA evaluation report – 2008 (27-08-2008)
- 4.3 A12 ESU evaluation report – 2008 (dd.09.2008)
- 4.4 Quality Assurance in Romania – ppt (28.06.2007)
- 4.5 Press releases of ARACIS reviews on Internet (2008)
- 4.6 EDU-CER letter to EUA - ENQA (14.09.2008)
- 4.7 ENQA letter to EDU-CER (24.09.2008)
- 4.8 Information about AIEQA and AEACE 2009
- 4.9 ARACIS letter on EDU-CER (2009)

Annexe 4. Judgements by the EUA review panel (2008)

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Sub-score	Final Score
ESG 3.1, 3.3 / ENQA criterion 1: Activities			FC
ESG Section 2 / ENQA criterion 1: External quality assurance processes			SC
	ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures	fc	
	ESG 2.2 Development of external assurance processes	fc	
	ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions	sc	
	ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose	pc	
	ESG 2.5 Reporting	pc	
	ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures	sc	
	ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews	fc	
	ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis	sc	
ESG 3.2 / ENQA criterion 2: Official status			FC
ESG 3.4 / ENQA criterion 3: Resources			SC
ESG 3.5 / ENQA criterion 4: Mission statement			FC
ESG 3.6 / ENQA criterion 5: Independence			FC
ESG 3.7 / ENQA criterion 6: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members			SC
ESG 3.8 / ENQA criterion 7: Accountability procedures			SC
ENQA Criterion 8: Miscellaneous			-

(FC/fc = Fully compliant; SC/sc = Substantially compliant; PC/pc = Partially compliant; NC/nc = Non compliant)

The review panel concludes that ARACIS is **substantially compliant** with ESG-standards.

Annexe 5. Judgements by the ESU study team (2008)

Criterion	Sub-criterion	Sub-score	Final Score
ESG 3.1, 3.3 / ENQA criterion 1: Activities			C
ESG Section 2 / ENQA criterion 1: External quality assurance processes			PC
	ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures	c	
	ESG 2.2 Development of external assurance processes	c	
	ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions	pc	
	ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose	pc	
	ESG 2.5 Reporting	pc	
	ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures	pc	
	ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews	c	
	ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis	c	
ESG 3.2 / ENQA criterion 2: Official status			C
ESG 3.4 / ENQA criterion 3: Resources			PC
ESG 3.5 / ENQA criterion 4: Mission statement			C
ESG 3.6 / ENQA criterion 5: Independence			C
ESG 3.7 / ENQA criterion 6: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members			PC
ESG 3.8 / ENQA criterion 7: Accountability procedures			C
ENQA Criterion 8: Miscellaneous			-

(C/c = compliant; PC/pc = partially compliant; NC/nc = non compliant)

The review panel did not consider it to be its task to express an over-all judgement as to the membership application of ARACIS

Annexe 6. Programme of site visit

Sunday, 01 March 2009

Time	Participants
15h30	Arrival of team members and transfer to the city; Check-in in Hotel
17h00	Panel meeting (team members only)
18h30	Dinner (team members only)

Monday, 02 March 2009

Meeting Location	Time	Participants
ARACIS Council Room	09h00 – 10h30	ARACIS Council – 15 Council members + 2 staff Prof. dr. I. Curtu, Prof.O. Calin, Prof. Dr. M.A. Ungureanu, Prof. Dr. R.M. Damian, Prof. Dr. A. Popovici, Prof. Dr. A. Lungu, Prof. Dr. R. Iucu-Bumbu, Prof. Dr. A.F. Miroiu, Prof. Dr. S Roth-Szamoszkozi, , Prof. Dr. D.A. Gaspar, Prof.Dr. M. Ivanescu, Prioef. Dr. D.M. Podea, Prof. Dr. M. Muthu, Prof. dr. O. Popescu, Prof. Dr. L. Vlasceanu, Lect dr. Mihai Floriou, Oano Sarbu
ARACIS Council Room	10h45 – 11h45	ARACIS QA and Accreditation departments – experts panel – 2 staff: Prof. Dr. R.M. Damian, Prof. Dr. A. Lungu, Prof. Dr. R. Iucu-Bumbu, Prof. Dr. A.F. Miroiu, Prof. Dr. S Roth-Szamoszkozi, Prof. Dr. A. Popovici, Prof. Dr. D.A. Gaspar, Prof. Dr. M. Ivanescu, Prof. Dr. D.M. Podea, Prof. Dr. M. Muthu, Prof. dr. O. Popescu, Prof. Dr. L. Vlasceanu, Lect dr. Mihai Floriou, Oano Sarbu
ARACIS Council Room	12h00 – 13h00	ARACIS Chairs of permanent commissions – experts panel Prof. I. Ianos, Prof. M. Dinca, Prof. I Abrudan, Prof. I. Lascar, Prof. N. Lascu, Prof. N. Antonescu, Prof. A. Pop
	13h00 – 14h30	LUNCH – Catering at ARACIS headquarters followed by free time for the experts panel
ARACIS Council Room	14h30 – 15h30	ARACIS evaluators - experts panel Prof. A. Bodiu, Prof. F. Magureanu, Prof.L. Ciolan, Prof. V. Stan, Prof. C. Cornescu, Prof. M. Cordun, Prof. A. Bargaoan, Prof. S. Coposescu
ARACIS Council Room	15h45 – 16h45	ARACIS Staff – experts panel + 4 people (Ion Tanase – Financial Manager, Mihai Floriou – PR Expert, Oana Sarbu, Mihai Marcu – Specialty Inspectors)
ARACIS Council Room	17h00 – 17h45	Representatives of the Ministry of Education – Prof. Remus Pricopie / Conselor of Minister, Prof. Sorin-Gabriel Popescu General Director/ general Direction in Higher Education, Luminița Matei General Director/ General Direction European Affairs and International Relations, National Council for Accademic Distinctions, Diplomas, Certificates Attestation – Prof. Grigore Bozga, Prof. Nicolae Tiberiu Pop. Chamber of Deputies (Parliament lower chamber) – Vasile-Ghiorghe Gliga, Dragoș Zisopol(TBC), Pető Csilla-Mária Members of Comittee for Education, Science, Youth and Sport,, Prof. Florian Popa(TBC), Prof. Iosif Ștefan Drăgulescu(TBC) Members of Comittee For Health and Family.

Tuesday 03 March 2009

Meeting Location	Time	Participants
ARACIS Council Room	09h00 – 10h30	Rectors Conference (University of Bucharest – Prof. Ioan Pânzaru, Constantin Brâncoveanu” University of Pitești – Prof. Alexandru Puiu, “Carol Davila” University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Bucharest – Prof. Florian Popa, “I.L.Caragiale “University of Dramatic and Cinematography Art of Bucharest – Prof. Gheorghe Colceag) + Rectors of private universities (Bioterra University Bucharest – Prof. Floarea Nicolae + 3 authorized universities – ASEBUSS – Prof. Marcel Duhăneanu, AGORA University Oradea - Mișu-Jan Manolescu, and Protestant Institute – Toma Ion), Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiești – Prof. Vlad Ulmanu, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration Bucharest – Prof. Paul Dobrescu.
ARACIS Council Room	10h45 – 11h30	Representatives of QA agency AEACE Representatives of EDU-CER – Ștefan Vlaston/ President
ARACIS Council Room	11h45 – 12h30	Representatives of the stakeholders – major employers – Bar Association/ Director Constantin Parasco, Romanian Development Bank, Forrestry Association, Ministry of Agriculture, Financial Auditors Chamber – Vicepresident Prof. Maria Manolescu, Oil association, Concordia Patronal Confederation – General Secretary Octavian Bojan
	12h30 – 14h00	LUNCH – Catering at ARACIS headquarters followed by free time for the experts panel
ARACIS Council Room	14h00 – 15h30	Students representatives – ANOSR (Mihai Vilcea – Vicepresident, Virgil Smărăndoiu - Representing ANOSR in ARACIS Counsel, Andrea Dobre – Evaluating student, Traian Bruma – Evaluating student) and UNSR (Mihaela Bardan – Vicepresident, Diana Iabrașu – Evaluating student , Florin Ciucă – Evaluating student, Claudiu Neagoe – Evaluating student).
ARACIS Council Room	15h45 – 16h45	Representatives of Teachers Union – Prof. Anton Hadar, Prof. Răzvan Bobulescu
ARACIS Council Room	17h00 – 17h45	Senate Representatives – Prof. Mihai Hărdău – President of Comitee for Education, Science, Youth and Sport, Prof. Nicolae Robu, Prof. Ioan Mang, Prof. Șerban Rădulescu – Members of Comitee for Education, Science, Youth and Sport
ARACIS Council Room	18h00 – 19h00	Aracis Consultative Comitee – Prof. Angheni, Prof.Miclea, Prof. Korka, Acad, Radu Voinea, Prof. Rostas, Prof. Lefter

Wednesday, 04 March 2009

Meeting Location	Time	Participants
ARACIS Council Room	9h00- 9h30	Remaining questions to ARACIS Executive Board Prof. dr. I. Curtu, Prof.O. Calin, Prof. Dr. M.A. Ungureanu, Prof. Dr. R.M. Damian, Prof. Dr. A. Popovici, Lect dr. Mihai Floriou,
ARACIS Council Room	9h30 – 11h00	Review Panel meeting (panel only) , summarizing conclusions
ARACIS Council Room	10h00 – 12h30	Final meeting with ARACIS Executive Board Prof. dr. I. Curtu, Prof.O. Calin, Prof. Dr. M.A. Ungureanu, Prof. Dr. R.M. Damian, Prof. Dr. A. Popovici, Prof. Dr. L. Vlasceanu, Lect dr. Mihai Floriou,

ANNEXE 7 MEMBERSHIP PROVISIONS



REGULATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION (ENQA)

(as from 26 September 2008)

TITLE I. THE NAME OF THE ASSOCIATION

Article 1 - Name

The association shall be called The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Its acronym shall be ENQA. ENQA is the legal successor of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

TITLE II. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Article 2 - Objectives

ENQA has been established to promote European co-operation in the field of quality assurance in higher education. The objectives of ENQA are:

- to encourage and develop the exchange of information and experience relating to the quality assurance of higher education, in particular on methodological developments and examples of good practice;
- to function as a policy forum, developing and proposing standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance;
- to fulfil requests for expertise and advice from European Ministers of Education, national and regional public authorities and other bodies associated with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA);
- to facilitate quality assurance activities in the area of transnational higher education;
- to promote the development and implementation of effective systems for quality assurance and accreditation agencies;
- to co-ordinate the management of reviews of quality assurance and accreditation agencies;
- to maintain and develop co-operation with other appropriate European stakeholder organisations;
- to contribute to the establishment of the EHEA;
- to conduct dialogues with other networks and regions.

Article 3 - Activities

In order to achieve its objectives, ENQA disseminates information on experience, good practice and new developments in the field of quality assessment and quality assurance in higher education to stakeholders, namely to public authorities, higher

education institutions, students and quality assurance agencies. ENQA's activities comprise events such as conferences, workshops and seminars as well as transnational quality assurance projects, publication of reports, cooperation with stakeholders and development and maintenance of its website. ENQA is a membership organisation which represents its members at the European level.

TITLE III. INVOLVEMENT IN ENQA

Involvement in ENQA can be obtained through:

- Membership (Full Member and Candidate Member)
- Associate status
- Affiliate status

Membership

Article 4 – Types of membership

ENQA has two types of membership: Full Membership and Candidate Membership. Membership is granted at the discretion of the Board of the Association. The admission of new members is subject to the following conditions:

i) Full Membership

Full Membership of ENQA is open to quality assurance agencies that meet the relevant criteria described in Annex I Membership Provisions document.

ii) Candidate Membership

Candidate Membership is available to quality assurance agencies that meet the criteria described in Annex I Membership Provisions document.

Article 5 – Membership fee

Full and Candidate Members are required to pay an annual membership fee. The amount of the annual, non-refundable membership fee shall be established by the General Assembly.

Article 6 – Membership application fee

Applicants for membership are required to pay a non-refundable membership application fee. The amount of the application fee shall be established by the General Assembly.

Article 7 – The Appeals and Complaints Committee

Functions:

There shall be an Appeals and Complaints Committee, which shall hear appeals and complaints against decisions and the conduct of procedures in respect of membership matters. The Appeals and Complaints Committee is a committee of ENQA, not a sub-committee of the ENQA Board.

A body whose application for membership is not accepted by the Board, or which is granted Candidate, rather than Full Membership, or which is redesignated from Full Membership to Candidate Membership against its wishes, may appeal in writing to the Board, indicating why it believes the Board's decision to be wrong. The Board shall ask the Appeals and Complaints Committee to review the decision, and the Board's

decision on the appeal shall be taken in the light of the Committee's report. The Board's decision on appeals is final.

Composition:

The Appeals and Complaints Committee shall comprise four representatives of Full Members, one of whom will be designated as an alternate member. In cases of conflicts of interest involving one of the members of the Committee, the alternate member will be asked to replace the member affected by the conflict of interest. The Appeals and Complaints Committee shall take decisions with a simple majority. The members of the Committee are appointed by the ENQA General Assembly for a three-year term. No member of the Committee shall serve continuously for more than six years. No member of the Committee shall also be a member of the Board, but at least one of the members shall normally be a former member of the Board.

Associate and Affiliate bodies

Article 8

In addition to membership, ENQA has two types of formalised relationship with other bodies, Association and Affiliation. Associates and Affiliates of ENQA are not members of the Association. Bodies that do not wish to, or for whatever reason are unable to, apply to become members of ENQA may request associate or affiliate status within ENQA. Where appropriate, a body may be invited to take up Associate or Affiliate status.

Article 9 – Associates

An Associate body shall be a bona fide organisation or agency with a demonstrable interest in the quality assurance of higher education.

Article 10 – Affiliates

An Affiliate body shall be a network of bona fide quality assurance agencies or other bona fide umbrella organisation concerned with the quality assurance of higher education.

Article 11 – Application procedure

An application for association or affiliation with ENQA should be made in the form of a letter addressed to the ENQA Board. This should include a brief introduction to the body concerned, key contact details, and a statement formally requesting either Associate or Affiliate status. A decision shall then be made by the Board as to whether ENQA agrees to the request; the decision shall be communicated by letter. The Board may request further information before making its decision. The Board's decision shall be brought to the General Assembly for final endorsement.

Article 12 – Benefits

Associates and Affiliates shall be entitled to receive ENQA publications and attend seminars and workshops, and be given access to the password protected parts of the ENQA website. They shall not however, be entitled to call themselves 'members' of ENQA and shall have no voting or eligibility rights.

Article 13 – Fee

Associates and Affiliates shall pay a non-refundable fee which corresponds to one half of the Full membership fee.

Common provisions for Members and Associates/Affiliates

Article 14

Members, Associates and Affiliates agree to abide by the regulations of ENQA.

Article 15

Members, Associates and Affiliates of ENQA may be asked to pay a fee to participate in workshops, projects and other activities organised by ENQA.

Article 16

The procedure for dealing with a Member, Associate or Affiliate whose fees are in arrears shall be decided by the Board.

Article 17 – Resignation and exclusion

Members, Associates and Affiliates may resign from ENQA membership and ENQA associate/affiliate status at any time by submitting a written notification of resignation to the President of ENQA. The resignation becomes effective immediately. The President shall notify the General Assembly and the Board of the resignation of the Member, the Associate or the Affiliate.

Members, Associates and Affiliates may be excluded by decision of the Board in case of breach of the present regulations, of the Membership Provisions or in the event of any action which is likely to cause prejudice to the Association's reputation or effectiveness.

The membership, associate and affiliate fees will not be reimbursed to the Agency in the case of resignation or of exclusion.

TITLE IV. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The bodies of ENQA shall be:

- The General Assembly
- The Board
- The Secretariat

The General Assembly

Article 18 – Functions

The General Assembly is the sovereign policy- and decision-making body of ENQA.

The responsibilities of the General Assembly are to:

- elect and dismiss the members of the Board;
- elect the President and Vice-Presidents of ENQA from amongst the members of the Board;
- amend ENQA's regulations;
- approve ENQA's annual work plan;

- receive, consider and approve the annual reports of the President and the Secretary General on the activities of the Association;
- receive, consider and approve ENQA's annual financial statements, including the annual external audit report;
- discharge the Board and the other accountable parties from liability for the accounts after approving the annual external audit report;
- identify and approve the external auditor and the number of chartered accountants who are to be involved in the annual external audit of ENQA's accounts;
- consider and determine the annual budget;
- establish the level of the annual membership fee to be paid by Full and Candidate members;
- establish the level of the annual fee to be paid by Associates and Affiliates;
- appoint the members for the Appeals and Complaints Committee;
- following a decision of the Board, ratify the admission of new members or the exclusion of members who are in breach of these Regulations;
- decide, if necessary, upon the relocation of the Secretariat from one country to another, giving one-year's notice if relocation to another country is to take place;
- take any decisions or make any recommendations to the Board that are necessary for the satisfactory functioning of ENQA within the framework of these Regulations.

Article 19 – Meeting and invitation

The General Assembly shall meet at least once a year. The date and place of the meeting shall be decided by the Board. The Secretariat and President of ENQA shall convene the meeting, giving at least 40 days' notice. Meetings of the General Assembly shall be chaired by the President of ENQA or, in the unavoidable absence of the President, by a Vice-President, to be nominated by the Board.

Article 20 – Composition

The General Assembly is composed of the representatives of Full and Candidate members of ENQA.

Article 21 – Election procedures

Full Members have the right to vote and speak at the General Assembly, and to nominate candidates for election to the Board. Candidate Members have the right to attend the General Assembly, except any closed parts of the meeting, and to speak at the invitation of the Chair. Candidate Members do not have the right to vote. Each Full Member agency represented in the General Assembly may cast one vote. Decisions of the General Assembly shall be adopted by ordinary majority. The members present at a meeting of the General Assembly constitute a quorum for the meeting (provided that representatives of more than half of the Full Members are present).

In the event of a vote, other than for the election of members of the Board, the President and the Vice-Presidents (see article 27), the voting procedure used may be either open or closed (secret). A closed ballot shall be used if one or more Full Members present so requests.

Article 22 - Observers

Key partner organisations, namely the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European

Students' Union (ESU), Education International (EI), BusinessEurope and the European Commission (EC) shall be invited to the General Assembly as observers. The Board may also invite other observers. Observers may speak in open discussions of the General Assembly at the invitation of the Chair, but may not vote.

The Board

Article 23 – Functions

The responsibilities of the Board are to:

- prepare and supervise a yearly work plan, to be discussed and approved by the General Assembly;
- prepare workshops and other activities as defined in the work plan;
- ensure that any specific mandate determined by the General Assembly is carried out;
- decide on the admission of new members or the exclusion of members in breach of these regulations;
- make recommendations to the General Assembly on any modification of these regulations;
- appoint the Secretary General;
- instruct and evaluate the work of the Secretary General in charge of the Secretariat, and the work of the Secretariat of ENQA;
- oversee the financial arrangements of ENQA and provide for the auditing of the accounts;
- take such other action as it may deem necessary in the interests of ENQA.

Article 24 – Composition

The Board comprises nine members, including the President and Vice-Presidents of ENQA, and has discretionary powers to co-opt a maximum of two further members. The elected members of the Board consist of representatives of agencies in Full Membership of ENQA. Co-opted members are appointed to serve until the next General Assembly.

Article 25 – Operation

The Board shall meet at least four times a year. The meetings shall be convened by the Secretariat giving at least 10 days' notice. Five elected members shall constitute a quorum.

The Board is accountable to the General Assembly.

Article 26 – Nomination of candidates

Full Members of ENQA nominate from amongst their number candidates for election to the Board. Nominations for the Board should be made to the Secretariat 40 days prior to the General Assembly. These should include a short CV of the nominees. Details of candidates shall be circulated to all member agencies prior to the General Assembly.

The principles of balanced gender distribution and balanced geographical distribution should be kept in mind while nominating candidates to the Board. A maximum number of two persons from any single member state of the EHEA shall be accepted for membership of the Board. The Board itself may indicate which candidates, if any, it encourages to be elected to the Board, keeping in mind the goals of balanced

gender and geographical distribution and the limit on the maximum number of members permitted from any one EHEA state.

Article 27 – Election of Board members

The members of the Board are elected by the General Assembly of ENQA for a three-year term. Three Board members retire each year, and three new members are elected at the annual General Assembly. Board members may not serve continuously for more than six years.

The elections of Board members, President and Vice-Presidents shall take place using a secret ballot of members. A simple majority shall determine the successful candidates. Each member agency shall have one vote per Board vacancy, one vote in the Presidential election, and two votes (one for each position) in the election of the Vice-Presidents.

The election of the Board as a whole shall take place by ballot and the results shall be announced to the General Assembly. The Board shall then seek nominations from among its membership for the position of President. The election shall take place and the result shall be announced to the General Assembly. The Board shall then seek nominations from among its membership for the positions of Vice-President. The election shall take place and the result shall be announced to the General Assembly.

If, in the election of Board members, two or more candidates receive the same number of votes, and the number of vacancies is insufficient to allow all to be elected, then the election between those candidates shall be rerun. If, in the second round of election, two or more candidates receive the same number of votes, the affected candidates shall be asked to agree among them which of them shall serve on the Board. If agreement cannot be reached among the candidates, the President at the time shall decide who shall be designated as a Board member. The election shall be re-run each time that an equal number of winning votes are cast for two or more candidates in the Presidential elections. Similarly, the election shall be re-run each time that an equal number of winning votes are cast for one of the positions of the Vice-President.

Article 28 – Representation of ENQA

Members of the Board represent ENQA by:

- fostering relations with other similar organisations;
- promoting the activities of ENQA;
- representing ENQA in relevant events;
- carrying out any specific mandates given by the General Assembly, the Board or the President, within the terms of these regulations.

Article 29

In the case of resignation, retirement, dismissal or death of a Board member, the Board may fill the arising vacancy by additional co-option. The same arrangement prevails for the vacancies of President and Vice-Presidents. Persons appointed under this clause shall hold office until the elections taking place at the next General Assembly.

Article 30 - Resignation and dismissal

Board members can be dismissed for stated reasons by the General Assembly by qualified, two-thirds majority of those present at the Assembly meeting (provided that more than half of the Full Members are present).

Board members may resign at any time by submitting a written indication of resignation to the President of ENQA. The resignation becomes effective immediately. The President shall notify the General Assembly and the Board of the resignation of the Board member.

The President and Vice-presidents

Article 31

Three of the Board's members are elected by the General Assembly to act as President and Vice-Presidents of ENQA. The terms of service for President and Vice-Presidents are one year, but may be renewed.

Article 32 – The President

The President of ENQA is also the Chair of the Board.

- As the Chair of the Board, the President:
 - presides over the meetings of the Board and casts the deciding vote in the Board when no majority decision can be reached;
 - plans, together with the Vice-Presidents and the Secretary General, the agendas of the Board meetings as well as the order of items and the documentation to be discussed at those meetings;
 - checks with the Secretary General the material for the Board meetings and for any other events;
 - is responsible, together with the Secretariat, for the follow-up to the Board meetings (communication of decisions, etc.).

- As the President of the Association, he/she:
 - presides over the meetings of the General Assembly;
 - does, together with the Vice-Presidents and the Secretary General, the strategic planning of the General Assembly meetings, and executes their follow-up;
 - represents ENQA and its Board externally;
 - represents ENQA, together with the Secretary General, in the Bologna Process;
 - carries out any resolutions, decisions or specific mandates given by the General Assembly or the Board;
 - conducts day-to-day work with the Secretariat;
 - observes the financial situation of the association through following the monthly accounts;
 - ensures, together with the Secretary General and the Finance Committee, that the annual work plans and budgets are followed;
 - assumes any other reasonable responsibilities deemed necessary by the Board;
 - submits an annual President's report to the General Assembly;
 - is accountable to the General Assembly.

Article 33 – The Vice-Presidents

The Vice-Presidents:

- carry out such reasonable duties as the President may request;
- deputise for the President, at the President's request or in his or her absence;
- carry out the strategic planning of the Board, the General Assembly and any other meetings and events together with the President and the Secretary General;
- observe the financial situation of the association through following the monthly accounts;
- are accountable to the General Assembly.

The Secretariat

Article 34 - Functions

ENQA shall have a Secretariat supporting the Association. The Secretariat shall provide such administrative assistance as may be required from it. The costs incurred by the Secretariat in carrying out its tasks of managing and administering ENQA are covered by the annual membership fees, the annual fees from Associates and Affiliates and contributions from such other sources as shall be available to it.

Article 35 – The Secretary General

The Head of the Secretariat shall be the Secretary General. The responsibilities of the Secretary General of ENQA are specifically to:

- maintain ENQA's records (including the files, minutes, databases and financial records);
- prepare an annual Secretary General's report, financial statements, and any other relevant documentation to be approved by the General Assembly;
- prepare the publications of ENQA;
- foresee that the ENQA website is regularly updated;
- convene, prepare, organise and record ENQA's meetings, including those of the Board;
- manage projects carried out under the aegis of ENQA, including grant applications and reporting;
- prepare the annual budgets and work plans and ensure, together with the President and the Finance Committee, that they are followed;
- instruct and supervise the work of the Secretariat;
- collect the annual membership fees, as well as the fees from Associates and Affiliates;
- collect any other financial contributions to the activities of ENQA;
- maintain ENQA's accounts and financial statements and submit these to the Board and the General Assembly;
- prepare, together with the accountancy agency, for the annual financial audit;
- function as a liaison between the Board, the Secretariat, the Members and the main co-operation partners of ENQA;
- appoint, in consultation with the President, the staff of the Secretariat and foresee for its job training;
- represent ENQA externally in the absence of Board members or when invited;
- represent ENQA, together with the President, in the Bologna Process;
- undertake such other reasonable duties as the President may request;
- assume any other responsibilities deemed necessary by the Board, not provided for in these regulations.

TITLE V. COOPERATION WITH KEY PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Article 36

In accordance with its broad objective to function as a policy forum developing and proposing standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance in the EHEA, and to maintain and develop co-operation with other appropriate European stakeholder organisations, ENQA is committed to a continuing cooperation with key European partner organisations. These include the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Students' Union (ESU), Education International (EI), BusinessEurope and the European Commission (EC).

TITLE VI. FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

Article 37

The financial year of the Association shall run from the first of January to the thirty-first of December.

Article 38

The finances of ENQA shall be subject to an annual external audit. The President shall propose the name of the external auditor each year to the General Assembly for approval.

Article 39

When proposing the budget, full accounts shall be submitted to the General Assembly, including a detailed report of the current financial position. A Finance Committee, comprised of three Board members, shall review the financial position of ENQA at least once a year and report to the General Assembly.

Article 40

In order to fund specific activities, ENQA may apply for financial support from other sources than the annual membership fees for purposes as described in Title II (Objectives and Activities).

Article 41

The President and the Secretary General, or, in the absence of the President, the Vice-Presidents, are authorised to sign formal documents on behalf of the Association.

TITLE VII. OTHER PROVISIONS

Article 42 – Dissolution of the association

The General Assembly can approve a proposal to dissolve ENQA by a two-third majority of the Full members present. In the event of dissolution of the Association in one country and re-establishment in another one, the assets and liabilities of ENQA shall be transferred to the new Association. In the event of permanent dissolution, any assets of ENQA shall be divided equally among agencies that are Full members of ENQA at the time of its dissolution. Similarly, any liabilities of ENQA shall be met equally by agencies that are full members of ENQA at the time of its dissolution.

Article 43 - Disputes

Any dispute over the interpretation and/or the application of these regulations shall be resolved by the General Assembly, advised by the Board.

ANNEX 1 – to Regulations

MEMBERSHIP PROVISIONS

CHAPTER I. CRITERIA FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP

Comment: the Board recommended at its meeting of 11 June 2008 that this first chapter of the membership provisions should incorporate more clearly the ESG. As a result, the membership criteria are now identical to the text of the ESG. The parts highlighted in blue are additional to the ESG and were already mentioned in the version of 28 March 2008.

Full Membership of ENQA is open to quality assurance agencies in the field of higher education from EHEA member states that have been operating and conducting actual evaluation activities for at least two years.

Before being accepted as a Full Member, an applicant agency must satisfy the Board that it meets the eight criteria, listed below. The applicant agency will thereby also meet the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as adopted by the European Ministers in charge of higher education in Bergen in 2005. The Board may modify the details of the procedures at its discretion.

Each criterion is followed by guidelines (in *italics*) which provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the criteria. Although the guidelines are not part of the criteria themselves, the criteria should be considered in conjunction with them.

ENQA Criterion 1– Activities (ESG 3.1, 3.3)

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis. The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines².

The external quality assurance activities may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the member.

ENQA Criterion 2 – Official status (ESG 3.2)

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

² Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ISBN 952-5539-04-0, Helsinki: ENQA, 2005.

ENQA Criterion 3 – Resources (ESG 3.4)

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes, procedures and staff.

ENQA Criterion 4 – Mission statement (ESG 3.5)

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

This statement should describe the goals and objectives of the member's quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of its work. The statement should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the member and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statement is translated into a clear policy and management plan.

ENQA Criterion 5 – Independence (ESG 3.6)

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- *its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);*
- *the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;*
- *while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.*

ENQA Criterion 6 – External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members (ESG 3.7)

- i. The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available.

- ii. These processes will normally be expected to include:
- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
 - an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
 - publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
 - a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

ENQA Criterion 7 – Accountability procedures (ESG 3.8)

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

These procedures are expected to include the following:

- i. a published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;*
- ii. documentation which demonstrates that:*
 - *the agency’s processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;*
 - *the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts, Committee/Council/Board and staff members;*
 - *the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;*
 - *the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. a means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external*

recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.

- iii. *a mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years which includes a report on its conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.*

ENQA criterion 8 - Miscellaneous

- i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgements and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups
- ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.
- iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

CHAPTER II. APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Application form and documentation

Applications for membership of ENQA shall be in the form specified by the Board (details obtainable from the Secretary General). Applications for membership are considered and decided upon by the Board on the basis either of submitted documentation alone, or of submitted documentation and a visit to the applicant body. Applications for Full Membership will only be considered where an independent external review report on the agency's conformity with the membership criteria, carried out in a manner and to a standard acceptable to the Board, is received (see 7iii above).

Candidate Membership procedure

If the Board decides, in the light of the application, that the applicant agency does not meet the above mentioned criteria for Full Membership, but is likely to be able to meet the criteria within two years of the Candidate Membership being granted, it may grant, at its discretion, Candidate Membership for a maximum of two years. At the end of that period (or sooner, if the Candidate Member so requests), the Board will require the submission of an external review report which demonstrates that the applicant meets the criteria. If, in the opinion of the Board, and following the submission of the evidence, the criteria are still not met, the application will lapse and the applicant will, by the decision of the Board, not be allowed to reapply for membership until a further period of two years has elapsed. During this period the agency will remain on the ENQA mailing list to ensure information dissemination on the activities of ENQA. If, following the request for further evidence, the Board grants Full Membership, the agency will be required to undergo an external review within five years of the date on which Candidate Membership was granted. If, however, the applying organisation does not have the intention or capacity to fulfil the Full Membership criteria, it can apply to become an Associate or Affiliate of ENQA (see Title III of the ENQA Regulations).

An applicant agency may apply for Candidate Membership rather than Full Membership in the first instance. The Board will grant such membership if it believes that the applicant demonstrates, through its application, substantial compliance with a majority of the criteria and further believes that the applicant will be able to demonstrate, through an acceptable external review submitted within no more than two years of the Board's granting Candidate Membership, full compliance with the criteria for Full Membership. If, after consideration of the review report by the Board, the Candidate Member is not, in the opinion of the Board, in full compliance with all the criteria, the application will lapse and the applicant will, by the decision of the Board, not be allowed to reapply for membership until a further period of two years has elapsed. During this period the agency will not be a Candidate Member but will remain on the ENQA mailing list to ensure information dissemination on the activities of ENQA.

External reviews

As indicated in criterion 7 above, it is a condition of membership that all Full Members of ENQA undergo an external review at least once every five years. If a member does not undergo an external review within five years of Full Membership being granted or reconfirmed, it will, by decision of the General Assembly, cease to be a member of ENQA. If, as a result of an external review, a member is judged not to meet the membership criteria by the Board, it will be given two years to conform with the criteria, during which time the agency will be designated as a Candidate Member of ENQA. A further review will be carried out by the Board, or its nominated reviewers, at the end of the two-year period (or sooner, if the member agency so requests). An agency that, in the opinion of the Board, and following the further review, remains in breach of ENQA's membership criteria will, by confirmation of the General Assembly, be debarred from ENQA. A debarred agency will be permitted to reapply for membership after a further period of two years.

Notification and Appeal

Applicants that are not accepted for membership or which are offered Candidate Membership, shall be notified of the reasons by the President of ENQA and shall be informed of the areas where the Board considers that further development or changes are required or advised. A body whose application for membership is not accepted by the Board, or which is granted Candidate, rather than Full Membership, or which is redesignated from Full Membership to Candidate Membership against its wishes, may appeal in writing to the Board, indicating why it believes the Board's decision to be wrong. Appeals should be addressed to the Secretary General. The deadline for appeals is two calendar months from the date of the notification of the Board's decision. The Board shall ask the Appeals and Complaints Committee (see article 7 of the ENQA Regulations) to review the decision, and the Board's decision on the appeal shall take into account the Committee's report. The Board's decision on appeals is final.

CHAPTER III. TRANSITIONAL MEMBERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

The Regulations describe the objectives, membership, structure and funding arrangements of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. ENQA was established on 4 November 2004 in Frankfurt, Germany when ENQA succeeded its predecessor body, the European Network for Quality Assurance in

Higher Education, which existed from 29 March 2000 until 4 November 2004, and which itself was founded in fulfilment of Council Recommendation 98/561/EC of 24 September 1998 on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education.

At the first General Assembly of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education held in Frankfurt, Germany, on 4 November 2004, it was agreed that the organisations that were Full Members of the Network at the point of dissolution, should be designated as Full Members of ENQA, subject to their agreeing to undergo a review, to the satisfaction of the Board, as described in the section on external reviews (under Chapter II) of the present document, within the first five years of ENQA's existence (i.e. by 19 September 2010). It was further agreed that organisations that were Associate members of the Network and that wished to continue in membership of ENQA, should be invited to make an application for Candidate Membership and be subject to the provisions of Title III, sections I and III of ENQA's Regulations and of the present document. Existing Candidate Members would continue in that category and be subject to the provisions for achieving Full Membership shown in the present document.