

Radu Damian
Director, International Relations, Projects and Cooperation
Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)
Bdul Marasti nr.59, sector 1 (in cadrul USAMV Bucuresti - Facultatea de imbunatatiri
funciare)
011464 Bucharest
Romania

Bern, 1 October 2018

Subject: Reconfirmation of membership of ARACIS in ENQA

Dear Mr. Damian,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting of 13 September 2018, the Board of ENQA agreed to reconfirm the ARACIS membership of ENQA for five years from that date. The Board concluded that ARACIS is in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and thus fulfils the membership criteria according to article 6, paragraph 1 of ENQA's rules of procedure.

Overall, the Board commends the efforts ARACIS has made since the last review to further enhance its quality assurance activities.

The Board would like to provide an articulation regarding standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct, where its opinion differs from that of the panel:

ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

The review panel notes that *"ARACIS should provide searchable digital copies of evaluation reports to the members of its Permanent Specialty Commissions and other committees in advance of meetings where such reports are discussed"*. While the recommendation of the review panel under this standard remains justified and relevant, the Board is of the opinion that the panel's judgement of the standard 3.6 as substantially compliant was overly strict as the requirements of the standard are met. Therefore, in the opinion of the Board, the standard 3.6 can be considered as fully compliant.

Furthermore, the Board emphasises the need to give more attention to ESG standards 3.4 and 2.6. Concerning ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis, the Board calls for ARACIS to continue with the good practice of regular publishing of reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities, such as the annual synthetic reports on the quality and quality assurance in Romanian higher education.

The Board would also like ARACIS to take specific note of the panel's recommendation in relation to standard 2.6 Reporting, where ARACIS, as noted by the panel, *"should ensure that they deliver improved performance, storage, organisation and presentation of data, including via the new ARACIS website, and that all its reports can be indexed by internet search engines"*.

The Board would like to receive a follow-up report within two years of its decision, i.e. by September 2020.

The Board also encourages ARACIS to take advantage of the voluntary progress visit – a new enhancement-led feature in the review process. The visit would take place in about two years' time from this decision. The ENQA Secretariat will be in touch with you in about a year's time to discuss this possibility. The costs of this visit have already been included as part of the review fee and are non-refundable except for the travel costs of the experts. More information about the progress visit can be found in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the ENQA Secretariat.

Please accept my congratulations for the re-confirmation of membership of ARACIS.

Yours sincerely,



Christoph Grolimund
President

Annex: Areas for development

Annex: Areas for development

As outlined by the review panel, ARACIS is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, on the following issues:

ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

ARACIS is recommended to draw more clearly the respective responsibilities of the Council, the President, the Executive Board, the Chief Executive Officer and the Secretary General to better meet the interests of transparency, accountability and good governance. Moreover, ARACIS is recommended to create a strategic plan setting aims for the agency's own development with targets against which it can measure its progress, and as a means of informing the Ministry of National education, higher education institutions and all those who work with the agency, of its priorities and expectations. Next, ARACIS is recommended to shift from addressing quality assurance as compliance to quality assurance for enhancement, for which it should seek support of the Ministry and create a partnership project that would be led by the agency and would involve the Ministry and HEIs. Finally yet importantly, ARACIS is recommended to either implement the 2013 review recommendation for a stakeholders' committee and to embrace a more generous definition of stakeholder, or that it substantially increases the number of stakeholder representatives on its Council.

ESG 3.5 Resources

ARACIS is recommended to discuss the present fees regime with HEIs and the Ministry with a view to ensuring that the level of fees the agency charges for its evaluations takes into account its operational costs more realistically. Moreover, the agency is recommended to explore other ways to secure funding for its office services, including information technology.

ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

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

ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

ARACIS is recommended to cease to treat 'learning outcomes' and 'competences' as synonymous in its evaluation methods and should develop a manual to disseminate the concept of learning outcomes to its evaluators and to higher education institutions in Romania.

ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

ARACIS is recommended to continue to take steps within the existing methodology to bring its practice into closer alignment with ESG 2015 on student-centred learning, learning outcomes and enhancement. Furthermore, ARACIS should undertake an analysis of the costs

and the level of workload to higher education institutions and other interested parties due to the current Romanian higher education quality assurance system.

ESG 2.6 Reporting

For its new evaluation methodology, ARACIS is recommended to broaden the view of the intended readership of its reports at programme and institutional levels to embrace potential students, those who advise students, and employers of Romanian graduates, and provide reports that are more accessible to a wider readership. Furthermore, ARACIS should ensure that it delivers improved performance, storage, organisation and presentation of data, including via the new ARACIS website, and that all the agency's reports can be indexed by internet search engines.