

**EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY
ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION / AGENTIA ROMANA
DE ASIGURARE A CALITATII IN INVATAMANTUL SUPERIOR (ARACIS) by
The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
(ENQA)**

Annex 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE

27 November 2008

1. Background and Context

ARACIS was established in 2006 as the successor organisation of the former Romanian National Council for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA).

According to the Romanian law, ARACIS is a legal, financially independent and autonomous public institution of national interest. ARACIS' task is to assure and improve the quality of the higher education system in Romania. ARACIS is responsible for both accreditation and quality assurance in Romanian higher education.

ARACIS was evaluated in 2007-2008 by a panel of experts of the European University Association (EUA), in order to analyse the Agency's compliance with the ENQA membership criteria.

Subsequently, ARACIS formally requested from the ENQA Board on 10 July 2008 that ENQA coordinate the external review of ARACIS.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This is a type A review, as defined in the Guidelines for national reviews of ENQA member agencies. It will evaluate the way in which and to what extent ARACIS fulfils the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Consequently, the review will also provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether Agency Name should be granted Full Membership of

ENQA. The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting to ARACIS Full Membership in ENQA.

The ENQA Board decided on 04 May 2007 to grant ARACIS Candidate Membership of ENQA. On that occasion the Board recommended that, in order to fulfil the criteria for Full Membership, ARACIS should address the following questions:

- 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)?

In the course of the review, therefore, the team members will pay special attention to the way in which these questions have been addressed.

In addition to analysing ARACIS compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines, the review aims to give background information on ARACIS role and tasks in the context of the HE system in Romania.

3. The Review Process

The process will be designed in the light of the ENQA policy on “ENQA-organised external reviews of member agencies”.

The evaluation procedure will consist of the following steps:

- Nomination and appointment of the review team members;
- Self-evaluation by ARACIS including the preparation of a self-evaluation report;
- A site visit by the panel of reviewers to ARACIS;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel will consist of five members: four external reviewers (two quality assurance experts, representative of higher education institutions and student member) and a review secretary. Two of the reviewers will be nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the national agencies, and will normally be drawn from senior serving members of staff of ENQA member agencies. The review secretary will be nominated by the ENQA Board. The fourth external reviewer will be drawn from nominations provided by the European University Association / European Association of Institutions in Higher Education. The nomination of the student member will be asked of the European Students’ Union (ESU). Current members of the ENQA Board will not be eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide to ARACIS the list of suggested experts with their respective curricula vitae. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the ARACIS review.

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

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

- Self-evaluation is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-evaluation report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation: background description of the current situation of the Agency; analysis and

- appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a summary of perceived strengths and weaknesses;
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which ARACIS fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the *European Standards and Guidelines*. The report will be submitted to the review panel a minimum of four weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

The review panel will draw up and publish a schedule of the site visit. ARACIS shall be given at least one month's notice of the site visit schedule in order to properly organise the requested interviews. The schedule will include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review team during the site visit, the duration of which will be 2 days.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the expert panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under article 2. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings. A draft will be submitted for comment to ARACIS within four weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If ARACIS chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chairperson of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the expert panel will take into account the statement by ARACIS, finalise the document and submit it to ARACIS and ENQA.

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

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

ARACIS will consider the expert panel's report and inform ENQA of its plans to implement any recommendations contained in the report. Subsequent to the discussion of the evaluation results and any planned implementation measures with ENQA, the review report and the follow-up plans agreed upon will be published on ARACIS website.

5. Budget

5.1 ARACIS shall pay the following review related fees:

- Chair 5.000 EUR
- Review secretary 5.000 EUR
- Other panel members (3) 3.000 EUR
- Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat 5.000 EUR
- Travel and subsistence expenses (approximate) 6.000 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30.000 EUR for the review. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses are exceeded, ARACIS will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget.

6. Indicative Schedule of the Review

The duration of the evaluation is scheduled to take about 11 months, from September 2008 to August 2009:

Agreement on terms of reference and protocol for review	September 2008
Appointment of review team members by ENQA	September-October 2008
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	October 2008
ARACIS self-evaluation completed	December 2008
Briefing of review team members	January 2009
Expert panel site visit	early March 2009
Draft of evaluation report to ARACIS	April 2009
Statement of ARACIS to review team if necessary	April 2009

Submission of final report to ARACIS and ENQA	May 2009
Consideration of report by ARACIS	June 2009
Consideration of the report and response of ARACIS by ENQA	July 2009
Publication of report and implementation plan	August 2009