Agenţia Română pentru Asigurarea Calităţii în Învăţământul Superior (ARACIS)
The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Report of the ENQA Review Panel

Site visit June 2013

8 September 2014

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2013 the Agenţia Română pentru Asigurarea Calităţii în Învăţământul Superior (the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) (ARACIS) hosted a review by a Panel appointed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) to determine whether ARACIS meets the criteria for Full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The Review Panel finds that in all areas of interest to ENQA but one, ARACIS is fully compliant with the ENQA criteria and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area as published in the 3rd Edition Helsinki, 2009 (ESG). For ENQA Criterion 1, ESG 2.3, Criteria for decisions, the Panel finds that criteria employed by ARACIS in evaluations that derive from the requirements of a professional body may not be referred to on the ARACIS web site where they could be brought directly to the attention of those to whom the criteria will be applied. In this respect the Review Panel finds ARACIS substantially compliant with the ENQA criteria and the ESG and recommends that ARACIS should publish <u>all</u> the criteria its evaluators are required to follow, including those required by professional and statutory bodies.

The Review Panel finds that information about the substantial programme of work ARACIS is undertaking, the reports of its programme evaluation panels, and its internal documents, including its internal QA Manual are not readily accessible on the ARACIS web site. The Panel makes recommendations in its report on these matters. The Panel also makes recommendations to ARACIS about the need to adopt a broader definition of the readership for its reports, and for the way its reports are written so that they are more attuned to the needs of students, employers and other stakeholders and about the need for it to be more ready to bring its achievements to the notice of its stakeholders.

The Review Panel notes that since 2009 ARACIS has engaged in a substantial development programme, "ACADEMIS", funded by the EU. This external funding has enabled ARACIS to promote the adoption by Romania's universities and other higher education institutions of an enhancement-focused approach to quality in higher education, so that they can move on from an approach that has been formalistic legalistic and compliance-oriented. As part of the ACADEMIS project, ARACIS also commissioned and published a series of three reports on the state of contemporary higher education in Romania. The Panel found that these "Quality Barometer" reports offered searching and constructive critical assessments of higher education in the State and that while ARACIS had promoted them to higher education audiences they deserved a wider readership, including outside Romania.

At the time of the present review ARACIS was about to propose a new enhancement-focused evaluation methodology to Romania's Ministry of Education. If the Ministry backs the new methodology the next ENQA review should have many new developments to comment on.

The Review Panel wishes ARACIS well for its next period of work.

INTRODUCTION

1   BACKGROUND AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

The Statutes of ENQA require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they fulfil the membership provisions. 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 (then) regulations (now statutes). Substantial compliance with the ESG thus became the principal criterion for 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. The external review of ARACIS was conducted in line with the process described in *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference.

The Review Panel for the external review of ARACIS comprised the following:

Name	
Dr David Cairns	Panel Chair. Director, Quality Assurance Research for Higher Education Ltd, UK. Former Assistant Director, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK.
Dr Nieves Pascual	Secretary. Associate Professor of English at the University of Jaén. Member of the Andalusian Agency of Knowledge, Department of Evaluation and Accreditation (AAC-DEVA), Spain
Professor Dezsö Sima	Professor, Obuda University, Hungary; .Former Vice President of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee
Dr Norma Ryan	Member nominated by the European University Association (EUA). HE consultant. Former Director of Quality Promotion Unit, University College Cork, Ireland.
Ms Anca Margineanu	Member nominated by the European Students' Union (ESU). Student at the University of Bucharest, Educational Vice President of ANOSR (National Alliance of Student Organisations [Romania]), Romania

2   GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	
ARACIS	Agenţia Română pentru Asigurarea Calităţii în Învăţământul Superior (in English, Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)
the Agency	ARACIS
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education http://www.ceenetwork.hu/
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENAEE	European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 3rd Edition Helsinki, 2009
ESU	European Students' Union
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
Ministry of Education	(Romanian) Ministry of National Education, formerly the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth, and Sports
Permanent Speciality Commissions	The standing committees of ARACIS charged with preparing for and overseeing the conduct of evaluations for subject domains.
SeECIS	EEducation System for Quality Evaluation in Romanian Higher Education
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

In the SER and other documents, ARACIS used the US-English term "specialty" and the British-English term "speciality" interchangeably. This report uses the latter form throughout.

3 INTRODUCTION

3.1 The reasons for commissioning the review

The review was undertaken according to the provisions for an ENQA "Type A" review in order to 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* (ESG). The purposes of the review also included providing information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether ARACIS should be reconfirmed as a Full Member of ENQA which will also enable ARACIS to apply for its registration with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) to be continued.

3.2 The place of ARACIS in the quality assurance structure of Romania

At the beginning of the 1990s, with the overthrow of the previous regime, higher education in Romania underwent profound changes. Access to higher education had been restricted under the previous regime and there was a high level of unmet demand for higher education which the public higher education system could not satisfy. This unmet demand created favourable conditions for the rapid formation of a large number of new higher education institutions.

In the course of the review the Panel was told that between 1990 and 2000 there had been a fourfold increase in the number of universities and other higher education institutions in Romania, of which 57 were in the public sector and 76 in the private sector. Aided by support from the World Bank, the Romanian Government had introduced legislation to regulate and control this new higher education sector. In 1993 a law of accreditation was adopted which was designed to deal with newcomers to the higher education sector in Romania that lacked the basic infrastructure necessary for a higher education institution. Universities were granted a measure of autonomy by legislation in 1995 and in 1997 the Law for the Statute of the Educational Personnel set out the rights and obligations of academic staff, including professors.

From 2000 to 2010 the approach to quality in higher education in Romania was described to the Panel as a mix of quality control, through accreditation, and quality assurance, with the later more strongly emphasised in the Law of National Education adopted in 2011, which emphasises the importance of national competitiveness and internationalization.

In its preparations for the review, the Panel found references on various web sites, including that of the European University Association, to institutional reviews being undertaken of Romanian Universities outside the formal framework described by ARACIS in the SER with the advice and assistance of EUA. Before the review visit the Panel asked ARACIS for additional information about these institutional reviews and how they related to the institutional reviews undertaken by ARACIS; the Panel followed up these enquiries during the visit. It learned that the 2011 Romanian Law of National Education had required all Romanian higher education institutions to be evaluated by international

panels in part to enable the "differentiation" of universities (public and private) into three major "clusters": research intensive, teaching and research oriented and mainly teaching institutions. On several occasions ARACIS emphasised to the Panel that the 2011 legislation required that it should play no part in this process.

Through further exchanges with ARACIS the Review Panel learned that the Ministry of Education had agreed with the EUA in March 2011 that the latter should provide advice and nominate international experts as evaluators for institutional reviews that were, in the event, overseen by an executive agency of the Ministry of National Education, UEFISCDI: the Executive Unit for Funding Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation. These institutional reviews had commenced on a "voluntary" basis in January 2013 but their legality had been challenged in the Romanian courts, so that the institutional reviews having commenced as a an exercise for which universities could "volunteer" their participation had then been suspended. When the present review visit took place, the results of some of the institutional evaluations conducted under the auspices of UEFISCDI had been published. Given the fluidity of the policy and political context for higher education in Romania following the promulgation of the 2011 Law of National Education, the Review Panel appreciated the difficulties that had faced the authors of the SER for the present review which had been drawn up in the closing months of 2012) in providing a context for the work of ARACIS (see also below, 3.6, page 8).

The Panel noted that under the terms of Romanian Laws approved in 2005, and the 2011 Law of National Education, higher education institutions may opt to be evaluated by another agency that is listed by the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

3.3   The main functions of ARACIS

The SER produced by ARACIS to support the ENQA review states that the main functions of ARACIS are

- to conduct external quality evaluations of first cycle and second cycle study programmes seeking accreditation
- to carry out periodic reviews of accredited study programmes
- to conduct external quality evaluations of higher education institutions
- to undertake system-wide analyses
- to co-operate with universities and provide advice and guidance
- to co-operate with the National Authority for Qualifications

At the time of the present review other functions and activities undertaken by ARACIS included

- drafting proposals for adapting its present evaluation methodologies to meet the requirements of the 2011 Law of National Education
- (from 2008 to 2012) coordinating and managing national projects in quality assurance, including projects selected for funding from European Structural Funds

3.4 The engagement of ARACIS with the ENQA membership provisions and the ESG

The engagement of ARACIS with the ENQA membership provisions and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) was summarised in the SER as follows

- (since 2007) participating in ENQA activities including ENQA co-ordinated quality assurance projects and other international projects in quality assurance

- hosting the ENQA General Assembly in October, 2011 and the CEENQA General Assembly in May, 2013

The SER also stated that ARACIS had participated in international events organized by INQAAHE and was co-operating with European International Professional Organizations such as the European Network for the Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE).

3.5 How the review was conducted

This external review of ARACIS was coordinated by ENQA. It was undertaken in accordance with the *Guidelines for External Reviews of Quality Assurance Agencies in the European Higher Education Area*, and in conformity with the "ENQA Code of Conduct for Review Experts", which sets out the principles of integrity and good review practice for external reviews.

Before the review ARACIS prepared a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and supporting evidence which it submitted to ENQA. These were later provided to the Review Panel as digital documents. In the course of the review the Panel requested additional information to assist it to a better understanding of the Agency's arrangements and the Romanian context. Almost all the additional information was provided before the site-visit. Some additional items were provided during the site visit. A list of the information provided by ARACIS to support the review can be found at Annex 2, page 46.

Following the appointment of the Review Panel, its Chair and Secretary consulted together and with other members of the Panel on a schedule of work to prepare for the review visit. This work included

- Analysing the SER prepared by ARACIS and establishing what additional information might be needed in order to understand and consider the national, social, and legal contexts that influence and determine the overall activity of ARACIS.

- Harmonizing the lines of inquiry generated by the Panel through members' analysis of the SER

- Establishing an agenda of matters to be explored with each group met by the Panel and identifying the specific questions that the Panel needed to explore with Romanian colleagues and students during a preliminary meeting with an independent Romanian liaison person and throughout the two-day site-visit in Bucharest, 18-19 June 2013

- Drafting and finalizing the Panel's report on the basis of a common agreement of all members.

The Review Panel received a teleconference briefing from Dr Helka Kekäläinen Vice President of ENQA, and Ms Maria Kelo, ENQA Secretariat, on May 31, 2013.

The Review Panel subsequently held a further teleconference discussion on June 8, 2013, and a brief preparatory meeting on 17 June 2013, in Bucharest, immediately before the site visit of ARACIS. The purpose of each of these discussions and meetings was to outline the overall tasks and the matters for discussion and to enable the Panel members to come to a common understanding and agreement of the matters to be addressed by the review and during the site visit.

During an intensive two-day site visit to ARACIS the Review Panel met with groups of students, evaluators, rectors, employers and senior members of ARACIS and others that it had identified in advance with the assistance of ARACIS. The Panel was also received by the Minister of National Education who briefed it on the current policy context for higher education in Romania. The schedule for the site visit and the names of those who met the Review Panel can be found at page Annex 1, page 44.

The Review Panel considers that the two-day site-visit provided relevant information to support the external review and wishes to thank ARACIS for the smooth organization of the site visit, and the Minister of National Education and all those who made time to meet the Panel to help it to gather and check information and further its understanding of the work of ARACIS. Their assistance was invaluable.

During the site visit and immediately after it, at the end of the second day of evaluation, members of the Review Panel discussed the evidence for the compliance of ARACIS with ESG and the ENQA membership criteria. A broad consensus on each criterion was reached.

Following the site visit the Secretary and the Chair prepared a draft report, which was circulated to the members of the Review Panel for further discussions and clarifications.

The report produced was based on the SER and its Annexes; the additional documents submitted prior to and during the site visit; the previous ENQA report (2009); the progress report ARACIS submitted to ENQA in 2011; other documents provided by ARACIS at the request of the Review Panel; on information gathered through the site visit meetings; and on subsequent clarifications provided by ARACIS.

3.6   National and international context for the review

As ARACIS was preparing for the review and drafting the SER, there was a change of Government in Romania. In April 2011 the then-Government had announced a "National Reform Programme" for education, including higher education. As part of this Programme it was the Government's intention to "differentiate" Romanian Universities and other higher education institutions into "clusters" of institutions "mainly for education"; institutions "for education and scientific research and artistic creation"; and "universities of advanced research and education". The criteria for undertaking this clustering were devised by a small group within the Ministry of Education and had not been accessible to those (such as University Rectors) who wished to understand why universities and other higher education institutions had been assigned to one cluster or another.

As a further part of this legislation-led process of change, the Government had decided that evaluations of universities for the purposes of differentiation should be undertaken by "an external body" for which purpose it had contracted with the European University Association to provide independent external advice. Participation in these reviews by universities was said to be voluntary and (as noted in 3.2 above) they have been coordinated by UEFISCDI with EUA providing nominations of international expert members. Under this voluntary scheme 37 publicly-funded universities and nine privately-funded universities have been evaluated. ARACIS informed the Panel that some of the reports of these evaluations had been published on the website of UEFISCDI.

The Review Panel discussed these developments with members of ARACIS and representatives of the Government that had taken office in December 2012. It was variously told that the legal status of ARACIS, guaranteeing its independence, and confirmed by the 2005 legislation, had required that it should not be involved in the development of the criteria for ranking, differentiation or clustering of higher education institutions; that the concept of differentiation still had support in the (new) Government; and that the institutional evaluations being conducted with EUA advice were valued because they provided a different perspective on institutional management and performance from that provided by the institutional evaluations performed by ARACIS.

In Romania recent Governments have made clear the importance they attach to the work of ARACIS, their commitment to continuing its independence (which is longstanding and guaranteed by statute) and their concern not to hinder the participation of ARACIS in European and wider international cooperation in quality assurance (and specifically the work of ENQA). The Review Panel was told on several occasions that it was important to ROMANIA for ARACIS to be listed on EQAR. At the same time, many of those who spoke to the Panel during the site visit were at pains to remind it that globalization had costs as well as benefits for Romania, such as the present substantial outward migration of expensively-trained, recently-graduated Romanian professionals.

4   FINDINGS

4.1   a. ENQA criterion 1 / ESG Part 2: External quality assurance processes b. ENQA criterion 1 / ESG 3.1, 3.3: Activities

ESG Reference: 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures **ENQA Criterion 1**
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
Guideline(s): The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

4.1.1 ENQA criterion 1 / ESG Part 2: External quality assurance processes

According to the SER, ARACIS has carried out a range of external quality evaluation activities for a variety of programmes at higher education level and evaluations of public-sector and private-sector higher education institutions since 2005. The Panel was told by senior members of ARACIS, evaluators, Rectors and students that the conduct of these evaluations generally follows the guidance published by ARACIS in its handbook "Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Performance Indicators of The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2006)". This handbook was made available to the Panel.

Since 2009 and the last ENQA review of ARACIS the Agency has undertaken and reported on more than 3,500 accreditations and evaluations. Between 2007 and October 2012, ARACIS conducted 81 institutional evaluations.

Programme evaluations

These include

- Evaluation of first cycle study programmes (Licenţă – in English: equivalent to Bachelor.

- Evaluation of second cycle (Master) study programmes.

For both first and second cycle programmes, evaluation is an essential first step for programmes seeking accreditation or for the continuance of accreditation for a further five years(see below). The programme evaluation process covers all full-time and part-time programmes and programmes provided through distance learning. The Methodology followed for programme evaluations is consistent with the provisions of Part 1 of the ESG.

Evaluations of Masters programmes

At the time of the present ENQA review in the course of conducting institutional evaluations ARACIS had evaluated more than 2,100 individual Masters programmes (see below) and was preparing for a new process of quinquennial evaluations of Masters provision by subject domain.

Evaluation of doctoral programmes

When ARACIS reported to ENQA in 2011 on progress since the 2009 review it stated that under the terms of "Law of national education No.1/2011" it was to be responsible "for evaluating … doctoral study programs". For reasons that were not clear to the Review Panel this did not take place and for the accreditation of doctoral programmes by research has remained the responsibility of another state recognised body. The Panel was told that the Government did not intend to alter this arrangement.

Programme evaluations are overseen and managed by "Permanent Speciality Commissions": standing committees distinguished by broad subject domains. These Commissions are supported by ARACIS officers who act as their secretaries. This professional support for the 'Permanent Speciality Commissions' and other senior ARACIS Commissions has been introduced since 2009 and was made possible by the positive response of the Government to a request by ARACIS to increase the number of its permanent administrative staff.

<u>Evaluations of Universities and other higher education institutions</u>

ARACIS is required by law to undertake institutional evaluations both as a prior step towards initial institutional accreditation and periodically to refresh the accreditation status of public and private higher education institutions. As with programme evaluations, institutional evaluations are overseen and managed by a Permanent Commission with 20 members. For institutional evaluations, students serve as full members of the evaluation team and are trained for their role. Other evaluators are drawn from the academic staff of higher education institutions in Romania and the membership of each evaluation panel includes an independent "international" academic evaluator from outside Romania.

ARACIS is required by law to evaluate three aspects of the work of higher education institutions: their institutional capacity; their educational effectiveness and their quality management. By the same law, every accredited higher education institution in Romania is required to have an internal commission that is coordinated by its Rector or chief executive to oversee the quality assurance of its academic activities. These internal institutional quality assurance commissions are required by law to have policies, databases and specific internal procedures and to operate in accordance with the ESG. Through its reviews ARACIS checks that institutional quality assurance commissions are in place and the contribution they are making to the work of the institution.

The Review Panel was told that ARACIS has encouraged Universities to strengthen the relevance of their institutional quality assurance units and to involve professional stakeholders in their procedures through periodic meetings, training sessions, conferences, and projects. The strengthening of quality assurance units is seen by policymakers as a key factor in strengthening and supporting institutions to be autonomous and take responsibility for managing their own resources, including their staff rather than (as is the case at the present) having to seek permission from the state for changes to staffing and the purchase of capital equipment.

Throughout, the Review Panel noted that while there are two student members of the ARACIS Council, and students will be involved in the new evaluation process for Masters domains, student do not participate as evaluators in the review of programmes. The Panel discussed the involvement of students in programme evaluations with students themselves and with members of ARACIS during the review visit and received additional information from ARACIS at the after the visit. The view of ARACIS is that having evaluated more than 4,000 study programmes that it and the students' organisations with which it works would find it impossible to identify, train and deploy student reviewers for all the programme reviews it undertakes. For the methods that ARACIS currently employs to review programmes this is perfectly understandable. ARACIS is, however, about to launch a new evaluation methodology for programmes and it is the Panel's firm view that one of the cornerstones of whatever methodology is adopted by ARACIS should be the participation of students as evaluators. This is consistent with the Panels view and its **recommendation** that for the future students need to be more fully involved in the evaluation of programmes and in all areas of the work of ARACIS (see also below, page 13). ARACIS has already identified the need to work in this direction. The Agency is also conscious of the need to involve stakeholders as members of evaluation panels, even though, as gathered from the Chairs of the Permanent Commissions, it is difficult to persuade them to participate (see also below).

Fully Compliant

4.1.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

ESG Reference: 2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes **ENQA Criterion 1**
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.
Guideline(s): In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used. As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

For its present evaluation methodology ARACIS was able to show through the SER that it provided comprehensive information on its evaluation procedures and other key information through its web site. The SER emphasised that the present evaluation methodology represented a considerable advance on its predecessor in that it had started to move from accreditation to quality assurance and to emphasise the importance of learning outcomes. The SER also described the training, support and briefing events that ARACIS had provided to disseminate information about its evaluation methodology to universities and other higher education institutions and for evaluators, including student evaluators participating in institutional evaluations and the new methodology for the evaluation of Masters domains.

At the time of the review, ARACIS was about to submit new proposals to the Ministry of Education for a revised methodology for evaluations. Senior members of ARACIS told the Review Panel that they intended to feed what they had learned from the present review into the proposals that ARACIS would submit to the Ministry in July 2013.

The Review Panel was not provided with draft materials outlining the new approach to evaluations that ARACIS intended to submit to the Ministry but it was told that the principles underlying the new approach were to develop further a shift from compliance and the focus on procedures towards quality assurance and improvement and to provide for greater flexibility in the evaluation criteria and procedures employed for individual institutions. The SER stated that ARACIS had consulted Universities and other higher education institutions about the principles of the new methodology through the meetings it had convened as part of the ACADEMIS project.

Not having seen the proposals that ARACIS will put to the Ministry for a new evaluation methodology, the Review Panel is not able to comment on what will be proposed for the format of the reports of those evaluations. The Panel can,

however, **recommend** that it would be helpful for students and stakeholders for there to be a main report on each university and higher education institution with the possibility to report additionally on programme domains at each institution where relevant (see also page 24). The Panel noted information from ARACIS to the effect that reports on Masters domains would not always be linked to institutional evaluations and that publication of reports on Masters domains would not commence for several years.

In several meetings with students, ARACIS staff, evaluators and others the Review Panel was told that universities and other higher education institutions needed to give more attention to internal quality assurance and not focus solely on preparing for external evaluations. Senior members of ARACIS referred the Panel to the sections in the SER that had described the work ARACIS had undertaken through the ACADEMIS project to promote quality assurance and quality improvement and to move on from using input measures to judge quality to measuring outcomes and the improvements they had secured. The Panel **recommends** to ARACIS that it should continue its work to provide support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions to adopt an improvement focus to their work on quality assurance.

In the course of its work the Review Panel noted that the role of students in the work of ARACIS was slowly growing but could be taken further. For example, as previously noted, students participate as evaluators in the evaluation of universities and other higher education institutions they do not at present participate as evaluators in the evaluation of programmes. Likewise, students do not participate as a matter of course as members in the work of the Permanent or Speciality Commissions, other than when the subject or discipline studied by a student member of the ARACIS is seen to enable them to participate in relevant meetings. As ARACIS continues to plan for the introduction of its new evaluation methodology the Panel **recommends** that it should plan to involve students fully as evaluators at all levels and to involve students and other stakeholders as members in the work of the Permanent and Speciality Commissions.

In its conversations with senior members of ARACIS the Review Panel discussed the information that had been provided about the membership of the corps of evaluators, Permanent and Speciality Commission members, and the ARACIS Council and other senior committees. The Panel commented to senior members of ARACIS on the predominance of male members at senior levels of ARACIS and was interested to learn that this was of concern to ARACIS itself and that it was working to improve the gender balance at all levels of its work. The Panel **recommends** to ARACIS that it should continue to improve gender representation at all levels of the work of ARACIS.

The SER stated that ARACIS had established a "standing commission of employers" but the Review Panel was unable to clarify whether employers of university graduates, leaders in secondary education or research institutes, as stakeholders in the work of ARACIS and Romanian higher education more generally, had been consulted about the principles for the new ARACIS evaluation methodology. Employers who were brought together by ARACIS to meet the Review Panel whose numbers included a member of what was described as a "stakeholders committee" spoke at length about what employers needed from Romanian higher education but did not appear to have had much prior contact with ARACIS.

As ARACIS continues to plan for the introduction of its new evaluation methodology the Review Panel **recommends** that it should make more widely known its establishment of a 'stakeholders advisory committee' and consider how to involve social partners, such as employers organisations and trades unions in its work. Such a strengthened stakeholders' committee could advise the Council of ARACIS on how to ensure that its valuable work is better known to stakeholders and on how to respond to the needs of stakeholders for information about higher education and higher education institutions in Romania (and further afield).

Conclusions

Fully Compliant.

Recommendations

- that ARACIS should plan to involve students fully as evaluators in programme evaluations (page 11)

- consider the benefits for students and stakeholders for there to be a main report on each university and higher education institution with the possibility to report additionally on programme domains at each institution where relevant (page 13)

- continue its work to provide support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions to adopt an improvement focus to their work on quality assurance (page 13)

- continue to improve gender representation at all levels of the work of ARACIS (page 13)

- take the opportunity presented by the introduction of the new evaluation methodology to arrange for students to be full members of evaluation panels at all levels and involve stakeholders and students in work of Permanent and Speciality Commissions as members (page 13).

4.1.3 ENQA criterion 1 / ESG 3.1, 3.3: Activities

ESG Reference: 3.3 Activities   **ENQA Criterion 1 cont.**
Standard: Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis
Guideline(s): These may involve evaluation, review, audit assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency

As noted above, since 2009 ARACIS has published reports on approximately 3,500 external evaluations of programmes and institutions conducted in accordance with the Agency's published methodologies. It was clear to the Review Panel that ARACIS viewed the independent, orderly and robust conduct of external evaluations of programmes, universities and other higher education institutions as its priority and its core function and that it has arranged its internal organisation in line with this priority.

Other activities

In 2007-2008 ARACIS worked with the Dutch Inspectorate for Higher Education under the Dutch MATRA programme framework to develop a Network for Higher Education Quality among higher education institutions in Romania. This was aimed at promoting and sustaining quality in the Romanian system of higher education. During 2008-2011, as part of an EU-funded project in Romania, ACADEMIS, a number of evaluators from higher education institutions were trained to reinforce the link between internal and external quality assurance and study visits were made to quality agencies in France, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Spain. In 2009 ARACIS collaborated with other Romanian agencies in building a quality evaluation tool for Health Programmes in higher education institutions.

ARACIS also cooperates with universities and other higher education institutions in organising events, briefings and conferences and through providing advisory services and cooperates with the Romanian National Qualifications Authority.

Additional activities have included

- since 2007, participation in other international projects in quality assurance, including organizing the CEENQA General Assembly in May, 2013 and participating in international events organized by INQAAHE

- since 2008, the coordination and management of national projects in quality assurance, including projects selected for funding from European Structural Funds

- since 2009, participation in ENQA activities including the organization of the ENQA General Assembly (October, 2011) and participation in ENQA-coordinated quality assurance projects

- cooperating with European International Professional Organizations such as ENAEE).

- 2011- drafting proposals for adapting evaluation methodologies to meet the requirements of the Law of National Education

Conclusion

For 4.1.1-4.1.3 and for its present evaluation methodology the Review Panel finds ARACIS to be **fully compliant** with ESG 2.2 and ENQA Criterion 1.

Recommendations

The Review Panel recommends for its future evaluation methodology that ARACIS should

- formally establish a 'stakeholders advisory committee' to advise the Council of ARACIS on how to ensure that its valuable work is better known to stakeholders and how to respond to the needs of stakeholders for information about higher education and higher education institutions in Romania (and further afield) (page 13)

4.1.4   ESG Part 2.3 Criteria for Decisions

ESG Reference: 2.3 Criteria for decisions procedures
ENQA Criterion 1 cont.

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.

Guideline(s): Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

Publication of criteria for use in evaluations

The SER stated that the criteria ARACIS follows in making judgements are published on its web site and that they are clearly stated in the contracts it signs with the university or other higher education institution to be reviewed. The Review Panel was not able to check this with reference to sample contracts but was able to confirm that in most cases the criteria that evaluators are required to employ when undertaking both programme and institutional evaluations are published by ARACIS on its web site.

There are exceptions to the above rule, however. For example, the Review Panel learned that for some subject domains the relevant Permanent Speciality Commission overseeing the domain can propose additional criteria to the ARACIS Council for adoption for that domain but that not all the necessary information about these additional criteria might be published on the web site of ARACIS. For example, when criteria apply to a professionally or statutorily regulated area it may be necessary for the reader to refer to the relevant body's web site as well as to that of ARACIS. This means that for the evaluation of programmes in some subject domains, those undergoing evaluation might not be aware of <u>all</u> the criteria against which they are to be judged. This is regrettable and the Panel **recommends** to ARACIS that it should ensure that as well as any additions that its Council approves to the criteria its evaluators are required to employ in making their judgements that criteria required to meet the requirements of a professional body (in Medicine, for example) are referred to on the ARACIS web site (with a web link) and brought directly to the attention of those to whom the criteria will be applied.

It was clear to the Review Panel that ARACIS was keen to ensure greater consistency in the findings and judgements that its evaluation panels make. The SER referred to a process of "inter-panel" consultation but in a context where it was not clear whether this was intended to be a response to a criticism made in the 2009 ENQA report which observed that evaluators who had drafted parts of a report sometimes did not have an opportunity to see the whole report until after it was published. The Panel was unable to clarify this matter.

Under the present methodology much of the discussion in evaluation reports appear to turn around input measures (as noted in the 2009 ENQA review report). These matters remain to be addressed under the new methodology. Nonetheless, stakeholders in a position to evaluate how the performance of ARACIS evaluation panels had changed since 2005 were confident that the

evaluators now performed more consistently and worked better and more coherently together than before.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Substantially compliant.

<u>Recommendations</u>

The Review Panel recommends to ARACIS that it should

- ensure that as well as any additions that the Council approves to the criteria its evaluators are required to employ in making their judgements, that criteria required to meet the requirements of a professional body are referred to on the ARACIS web site (with a web link) and brought directly to the attention of those to whom the criteria will be applied (page 16)

4.1.5   ESG Part 2.4 Processes fit for purpose

ESG Reference: 2.4 Processes fit for purpose **ENQA Criterion 1 cont.**
Standard: All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.
Guideline(s): Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance. Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy: • insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task • the exercise of care in the selection of experts • the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts • the use of international experts • participation of students • ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached • the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review Recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

4.1.5.1   ARACIS requires that experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task

The SER described the use of "an electronic facility … which allows the agency to test the level of understanding of the QA procedures of the agency of all the external evaluators, local and from abroad, who expresses the wish to take part in evaluation of study programs and higher education institutions". Candidate evaluators who pass this initial diagnostic test are then required to attend

training sessions organized by ARACIS before they are eligible to be selected to join a programme evaluation panel.

Institutional evaluators are selected from existing programme evaluators who have participated successfully in programme evaluations. It was not clear to the Review Panel whether the same requirement also applied to "foreign experts" participating in institutional evaluations.

Candidates for appointment as student evaluators are nominated by students' unions or can self-nominate but must undergo the same diagnostic test as other evaluators and be trained before they are eligible to be selected to participate in an institutional evaluation panel.

The Review Panel discussed the conduct and outcomes of evaluations with many of the groups it met during the site visit. It noted with interest that more than one stakeholder group expressed reservations to it about the fitness of some evaluators to fulfil their responsibilities. In one case it was observed to the Review Panel that the definition of conflict of interest that ARACIS appeared to follow, which appeared to overlook the possibility for close links between individuals in small national subject communities. Others who met the Panel observed that the insistence on evaluators holding high academic qualifications discounted the importance of practice-based experience for applied and vocational subjects.

4.1.5.2   Care is taken by ARACIS in the selection of experts

For programme evaluations the membership of each three person programme Review Panel is drawn up by the Secretary of the relevant Permanent Speciality Commission, who assesses their suitability, skills and competences against the set criteria. The Secretary presents their proposals for the membership of the evaluation panel to the Chair and other members for consideration and approval. Among other considerations the Secretary checks that there are no institutional conflicts of interest and that the proposed evaluator has the necessary competence in the subject domain. The Review Panel was told that identifying and appointing appropriately qualified evaluators was a challenging task.

For programmes offered in minority languages, such as Hungarian, one member of the panel will be a native speaker of that language. For the evaluation of programmes at Masters level the evaluation panel consists of two persons with competence in the relevant subject domain, together with a member of the Permanent Commission for the domain. The Review Panel was told that in selecting evaluators ARACIS attempted to achieve a balance of expertise, geographical spread of the evaluation panel, gender, and ethnicity. Members of Permanent Commissions, the Commission for Institutional Evaluation and evaluators who met the Review Panel confirmed that their experience matched the descriptions in the SER.

Potential institutional evaluators are selected by the Evaluation Department of ARACIS. Before an evaluator can be appointed to an institutional evaluation panel they must have successfully completed a number of programme evaluations. International experts are selected on the basis of invitations to apply and applications returned to ARACIS. As part of the present evaluation methodology for institutional evaluations a sample of study programmes is evaluated at the same time as part of the same activity and contribute information to the overall institutional evaluation, so that knowledge of the

programme evaluation procedure is a valuable prerequisite for an institutional evaluator.

4.1.5.3 Experts are provided with appropriate briefing or training

An Annex to the SER included the progress report ARACIS had made to ENQA in May 2011, following the 2009 ENQA review. This provided detailed information on the steps ARACIS had taken to improve its internal quality assurance procedures. It described how ARACIS trains evaluators for programmes, including international evaluators and noted that ARACIS had published several documents to provide advice and support for programme evaluators, including a 687-page manual that had been prepared by "32 … leading evaluators and members of permanent speciality commissions".

For programme evaluators who can satisfy the requirements of ARACIS through the "electronic facility" there is a large volume of additional information available for them to consult on the ARACIS web site and the possibility of attending additional training sessions, such as those provided as part of the ACADEMIS programme between 2010 and 2012. Some of those who met the Review Panel during the site visit did, however, express concerns about the extent to which the present training for evaluators enabled them to perform their role thoroughly, notwithstanding the quality control measures that ARACIS has in place.

One element of the ACADEMIS project, which has now ended, was the provision of additional training and support for evaluators. The Review Panel was told about these training sessions in several meetings throughout the visit and understood that they had been well-received and had assisted in the wider understanding of the methods and criteria employed in ARACIS evaluations.

During the site visit the Review Panel discussed the training that ARACIS plans to provide for evaluators in the new evaluation methodology. It was told that ARACIS expected to use a virtual learning environment (VLE) to train evaluators. The Panel doubted whether the employment of training for evaluations delivered chiefly through a VLE would equip individuals with the analytical and soft skills that a successful programme or institutional evaluator is likely to require. It received further information from ARACIS about the training it currently provides for institutional evaluators which includes provision for face-to-face training and that for its future methodology there was no intention to cease such face-to-face sessions.

In several meetings during its visit the Review Panel was told by those it met that the performance of ARACIS evaluators varied to a marked degree, notwithstanding the quality control and quality assurance measures that the Agency has in place. The Panel acknowledges that ARACIS does not share its concerns to the same extent, but it refers the Agency's to the number of appeals made against the findings of its evaluation panels, and the number of appeals that have been upheld, as indicating that ARACIS needs to devote more attention to briefing and training its evaluators, including institutional evaluators, where the breadth and generality of the evaluation at institutional level can be particularly challenging – as ARACIS itself acknowledges. As ARACIS plans for the introduction of a new evaluation methodology the Panel **recommends** that it should provide further specific and separate face-to-face training sessions for programme and institutional evaluators, to be supplemented by training via its VLE.

4.1.5.4 International experts are included in the evaluation panels

"Foreign experts" participate in the work of ARACIS institutional evaluation panels. Their reports contribute to the overall composite report on the institution and are also published separately on the Agency's web site. Similarly, reports by the student members of the institutional evaluation panels contribute to the overall composite report and they are also published separately on the ARACIS web site.

ARACIS encourages Romanian evaluators to serve as "foreign experts" in other jurisdictions. Overall, it was not clear to the Review Panel whether foreign experts participated in programme evaluations.

4.1.5.5 Students are enabled to participate in the work of the evaluation panels

Institutional evaluation panels include student members who, as noted earlier, are able to draw up their own report which is published on the ARACIS website. Under the present programme evaluation methodology students do not participate as members of programme evaluation panels. The Review Panel discussed this matter with students and members of ARACIS.

Students told the Review Panel that they had been pressing for the opportunity to serve as full members of programme evaluation panels because students generally found the characteristics of particular study programmes of most interest. Members of ARACIS acknowledged the desirability of including students as members of programme evaluation panels and pointed to their inclusion as full members in the methodology that ARACIS had proposed to the Ministry for Masters domains. Members of ARACIS also acknowledged that this would involve more training for student programme evaluators.

The Review Panel recognises that as well as benefits to the participation of students as programme evaluators, such as greater transparency and a sharpening of the focus of evaluations on student-facing matters, there will be costs. It suggests that these might be spread by arranging for students and other evaluators to be trained together and that this would contribute to greater consistency in the conduct and of evaluations and greater relevance for students as stakeholders in Romanian higher education. The Panel therefore **recommends** that ARACIS should now move to involve students more fully in programme evaluations with, as a possible first step, the involvement of students as full members of Permanent Speciality Commissions, to be followed as soon as possible thereafter by the inclusion of students as members of evaluation panels at all levels. The Panel also **recommends** that ARACIS should take the opportunity presented by the introduction of the new evaluation methodology to arrange for students and stakeholders to be members of evaluation panels at all levels from the commencement of the new evaluation methodology.

4.1.5.6 ARACIS ensures that the review procedures it uses are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached

For programme evaluations members of the relevant Permanent Speciality Commission attend closely to the formation of the evaluation panel and a member of the Commission attends the evaluation visit. Members of the Permanent Speciality Commission also have opportunities to check the draft

report and discuss its findings and how they compare with the findings for similar programmes and institutions. The Permanent Speciality Commissions are able to challenge evaluation reports that lack sufficient evidence to support their findings and judgements and seek additional information.

For institutional evaluations a member of the Permanent Commission that oversees institutional evaluations attends the evaluation visit as a coordinator; a "technical secretary" from among the permanent staff of ARACIS also attends institutional evaluation visits to support the process. Members of the ARACIS Advisory Commission, or Council, who met the ENQA Review Panel told it that one of their number also attended institutional evaluations and that the Advisory Commission also served as an appeal panel for institutional evaluations (see ENQA Criterion 8: Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims, page 39).

While recognising that the present evaluation methodology is likely to be superseded in the near future, and that it largely focuses on input measures, the Review Panel is satisfied that ARACIS takes reasonable steps to ensure that there is sufficient evidence to support the findings and judgements of its evaluations.

4.1.5.7 ARACIS uses the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review

The Review Panel is able to confirm that the evaluation methodology employed by ARACIS for programme evaluations, accreditations, and institutional evaluations corresponds to the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review. Further comments can be found below in ESG Part 2.6 Follow-Up Procedures (page 26).

4.1.5.8 ARACIS recognises the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

In its present evaluation methodology ARACIS states that the chief aim of the evaluation methodology is to "promote that quality culture which will consistently contribute to achieving a quality higher education, defined as a public good, worthy of public trust, and contributing to a student's personal development and achievement, as well as to the continuous improvement of the quality of life, culture and national economy within a European framework".

The Review Panel is mindful that its brief is to evaluate the present evaluation methodology followed by ARACIS, and that it has not seen the draft proposals that ARACIS was shortly to put to the Ministry; nonetheless it is worth reporting that members of ARACIS in more than one meeting expressed their determination to move in the new methodology to adopt a clearer focus on quality improvement. This would be consistent with the work that has been undertaken under the ACADEMIS project to train "internal" evaluators in universities and other higher education institutions to work on the internal evaluations of programmes and other aspects of institutional life.

The Review Panel is satisfied that ARACIS recognises the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

Conclusion

Fully Compliant.

4.1.6   ESG Part 2.5: Reporting

ESG Reference: 2.5 Reporting procedures **ENQA Criterion 1 cont.**
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.
Guideline(s): In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone. In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers. Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

The format of evaluation reports and their contents

The Review Panel was unable to view a sample reports of programme evaluations as none were provided by ARACIS in English translation. Likewise, no examples of institutional evaluation reports were provided in translation although there were links to the reports on the ARACIS web site including some brief reports in English by foreign "experts" typically titled "Raport evaluator strain".

The present Review Panel appreciates that translating a <u>small</u> sample of each kind of evaluation report into English would represent an added burden for those hosting an ENQA review but without such samples it is not possible for an ENQA panel to offer authoritative comments on the typical format and contents of such reports. The Panel that conducted the ENQA review of ARACIS in 2009 made similar observations and the present Panel is disappointed that it is unable to comment on the reports that ARACIS publishes on its web site (see below). These comments are for the information of ENQA as well as ARACIS and may apply for other ENQA reviews.

Members of ARACIS told the Review Panel that reports of programme evaluations were made public and provided the Panel with detailed instructions and a web link to its archive of reports for 2012, organised under the titles of the Speciality Commissions that had commissioned and overseen them. The Panel **recommends** that ARACIS places this web link and an explanation of how to find and download individual reports (as zip files) on the Home Page of its web site.

For programme evaluations there are three possible levels of confidence: "confidence", "limited confidence" and "no confidence". For institutional evaluations there are four possible levels of confidence: "high degree of

confidence"; "confidence"; "limited degree of confidence" and "lack of confidence."

The Panel was told that ARACIS experienced a low rate of hits on its web site – in the region of 500 per day. Such a low rate indicates that at present (and despite a recent redesign) the web site is not serving as an effective means of disseminating information to Romanian students, employers and members of the public. This is a matter that ARACIS needs to tackle forthwith.

<u>Reports of institutional evaluations</u>

Before the site visit the Review Panel browsed the ARACIS web site the English and Romanian versions of which, as noted above, provide links to the reports of institutional evaluations. These are typically posted in up to seven sections as follows

- a short summary report of the decision of the ARACIS Council that appears to set out the overall outcomes of the evaluation

- a short reference document outlining the institution's essential features provided by the Department of External Evaluation of ARACIS

- a substantial composite report, compiled from the contributions of the evaluators by the Coordinator for the evaluation, setting out the findings of the review under three main headings "Main report"; "Conclusions"; and "Recommendations". Under the "Main report" heading there are sub-sections titled ""Institutional capacity"; "Educational Effectiveness" and "Management"

- a substantial report compiled by the student evaluators

- a report provided by the "foreign" or international expert, which is often in English but can be in other languages

- the formal report from ARACIS to the Rector of the University or the head of the institution setting out the findings of the evaluation

- a response from the institution that has been evaluated to the findings of ARACIS.

Many of the digital documents that the Panel viewed on the ARACIS web site had been uploaded in the portable document file (pdf) format. These files are produced by proprietary software in two varieties: image files (essentially, photographs of pages) and files that are combinations of text and images. Only the latter are "machine readable", with contents that can be indexed by internet search engines. Almost all the evaluation and formal reports sampled by the review team in the institutional evaluation section of the web site were image files: their contents were therefore effectively hidden from internet search engines and browsers in Romania and further afield who use internet search engines to identify material of interest, including reports of individual evaluations.

ARACIS informed the Review Panel that it is required to publish evaluation reports as "signed and sealed" documents on its web site and that without signatures and official seals its reports would be considered invalid by members of the general public in Romania. The Panel does not dispute this interpretation but it is confident that it is possible to mix images (of seals and signatures) AND text in pdf files that can be machine readable: this would make ARACIS reports more widely available and easier to download.

The Review Panel acknowledges the substantial resources that ARACIS devotes to producing the reports of its evaluations. For the reports of these evaluations not to be as fully and widely accessible as possible is unfortunate and restricts the access of stakeholders to an important source of information about Romania's higher education institutions. The Panel **recommends** that ARACIS should publish all its evaluation reports (including, eventually, those for evaluations already completed) on its web site as individual searchable documents that include the necessary authentication details.

The intended readership for the evaluation reports

The Review Panel discussed the reports of its evaluations with members of ARACIS and with others during the site visit. It heard that present evaluation reports were viewed as technical documents written for a specialist academic audience, that they were written in technical language, and that they did not address the needs of potential students and other stakeholders, such as employers.

Students told the Review Panel that more information was needed on institutions and programmes for potential students and that it would be helpful if the new evaluation methodology made provision for reports (or sections in reports) to assist potential students. Employers' representatives who met the Panel told it that more information about higher education and higher education institutions would be helpful.

As ARACIS submits its proposals for a new evaluation methodology to the Ministry of Education, the Review Panel **recommends** that it should broaden its view of the intended readership of its reports at programme and institutional levels to embrace potential students and employers of Romanian graduates. They will need clearer and more easily accessible information than is provided at present and the Panel **recommends** that ARACIS should develop short and clearly written reports specifically for these audiences. To identify what these shorter reports should cover, the Panel also **recommends** that ARACIS should undertake a research exercise to identify the information that students and employers need to draw on in order to identify programmes and institutions when making choices and consider the possibility for institutional evaluations of issuing a main report with the flexibility to report additionally on programme domains. The Panel further **recommends** that the reports of programme evaluations and institutional evaluations that have already been published should be grouped on the ARACIS web site, so that all programme evaluation reports for a particular university or other higher education institution can be viewed and accessed on the same web page(s). This should also be a feature to be considered when ARACIS reports produced under the new evaluation methodology are presented on the web site, at which time ARACIS might also consider whether sectoral reports (on medical schools or Engineering Schools, for example) might be useful to students and employers.

Meeting the recommendations outlined above may require ARACIS to enhance its Information Technology arrangements and if that is necessary to deliver improved performance, storage and organisation of data and the ARACIS website the Review Panel **recommends** that ARACIS should be prepared to make such enhancements and that this would be well worthwhile.

Within two weeks following an evaluation the preliminary results are sent to the university or other higher education institution that has hosted the evaluation "so that it can submit in writing any comments and suggestions to correct data that were either misunderstood or inadequately taken". For evaluations of programmes, the findings and judgements of the evaluators are communicated in a report that is drafted by the Review Panel itself.

The draft evaluation report is reviewed by the members of the Permanent Commission for the domain, who check that the procedures specified by ARACIS have been followed by the evaluators and that "the contents of the report are in line with the regulations and consistent with decisions taken in other comparable evaluations." Where there are gaps in the report the Permanent Commission may invite the "institution or study program … to further the evidence". The Panel was sure whether this would also prompt ARACIS to look into the cause of the gaps, and the thoroughness with which the evaluation had been conducted overall.

When approved by the Permanent Commission, draft reports are also checked by the ARACIS Departments of Accreditation and External Quality Evaluation before being finally sent to the ARACIS Council The Heads of the two Departments are members of the Council, as are the Chairs of the Permanent Commissions. Once the ARACIS Council has considered and approved an evaluation report it is sent to the host institution or university and there is a short delay to allow for the possibility of an appeal. Where there is no appeal the report is subsequently published on the ARACIS web site. A copy of the report is also provided for the Ministry of Education "for legal follow-up". The procedure followed where there is an appeal is described in ENQA Criterion 8: Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims, page 39.

Composite reports of institutional evaluations are drafted by the ARACIS Department of External Quality Assurance Evaluation integrating the findings of the evaluators, the "Mission Director" who has coordinated the review, the student evaluators and the foreign expert. In the course of the visit the Panel was interested to learn that alongside this composite institutional evaluation report ARACIS also publishes the individual reports of the evaluators, the foreign expert, and the students who have participated in the evaluation. This wealth of information is available to Romanian visitors to the ARACIS web site but is not available on the English language version of the web site translation, although reports of the foreign experts are often in English and make interesting reading.

The Review Panel was interested in the multi-level quality control process ARACIS operates for evaluation reports which at first sight appeared to be over-engineered. The Panel was told, however, that this elaborate process was required to enable ARACIS to have as nearly as possible complete confidence in the findings of reports that could sometimes be vigorously contested and be the subject of appeals (see also, ENQA criterion 5 / ESG 3.6: Independence page 35 and ENQA Criterion 8: Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims, page 39).

Reflecting on its meetings with evaluators and members of the Permanent Speciality Commissions, the Review Panel came to the view that their work and their expertise were making an important contribution to the achievements of ARACIS. Members of the Council of ARACIS may attend meetings of one or more

Permanent Speciality Commissions to observe their proceedings and represent the Council's views to the Commissions and vice-versa. As ARACIS continues to work towards the introduction of its new evaluation methodology, the Review Panel **recommends** that it should strengthen the existing links between the Chairs of the Permanent Commissions and the Council through creating a new advisory committee of Chairs of the Permanent Commissions.

Conclusions

The Review Panel has no evidence that ARACIS is not **Fully Compliant**.

Recommendations

The Review Panel recommends that

- for its new evaluation methodology ARACIS should broaden its view of the intended readership of its reports at programme and institutional levels to embrace potential students and employers of Romanian graduates (page 24)

- ARACIS should develop shorter and clearly written reports in accessible language specifically for potential students and employers of Romanian graduates (page 24)

- ARACIS should undertake a research exercise to identify the information that students and employers need to draw on in order to identify programmes and institutions when making choices, and consider the possibility for institutional evaluations of issuing a main report with the flexibility to report additionally on programme domains (page 24)

- the reports of programme evaluations and institutional evaluations that have already been published should be grouped on the ARACIS web site, so that all programme evaluation reports for a particular university or other higher education institution can be viewed and accessed on the same web page(s) and that this should also be a feature to be considered when ARACIS reports produced under the new evaluation methodology are presented on its web site (page 24)

- be prepared enhance its Information Technology arrangements to enable it to deliver improved performance, storage and organisation of data and the ARACIS website (page 24)

- strengthen the existing links between the Chairs of the Permanent Commissions and the Council through creating a new advisory committee of Chairs of the Permanent Commissions (page 26).

4.1.7   ESG Part 2.6 Follow-Up Procedures

ESG Reference: 2.6 Follow up-procedures **ENQA Criterion 1 cont.***)*
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.
Guideline(s): Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: it should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and

implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

Under its present evaluation methodology, for evaluations that have resulted in a statement of "limited confidence" or one of a "lack of confidence" ARACIS expects universities and other higher education institutions to respond to recommendations in its reports with a "follow-up policy" that is developed and shared with ARACIS. According to the SER, ARACIS checks that there has been progress with this follow-up policy after a year.

For institutional evaluations that have been evaluated at the highest level of confidence follow-up action takes the form of a short visit to the institution after three years or a high-level meeting with institutional leaders. Institutions that wish to undertake improvement measures and to have these validated (and the judgement recorded about them amended) may apply to ARACIS for a second evaluation and that more than 10 such re-evaluations had been undertaken between 2008 and 2013, not all of them with the hoped-for outcome.

These follow-up procedures for institutional evaluations appear reasonable and sufficient, and the Review Panel is broadly satisfied that their design meets the expectations of the ESG. However, when the Panel discussed the follow-up to institutional evaluations with evaluators and others during the review it was told that some recent institutional evaluations had shown that the institutions in question had only begun to pay serious attention to the recommendations of the previous evaluation shortly before being re-evaluated. The Panel considers that for its future evaluation methodology ARACIS should make it a requirement that a follow-up report is made to ARACIS by the institution one year after the publication of the report <u>in all cases</u> including where the institution or programme has secured the most positive outcome possible. This would be in keeping with the determination ARACIS expressed to the Panel to move to an enhancement focus in its evaluation work.

In the SER ARACIS stated that it had analysed a substantial number of follow-up responses to programme and institutional evaluations and had found that in most cases the performance of the relevant programmes and institutions could be seen to have improved.

In the course of the site visit the Review Panel was able to discuss the conduct of the evaluations with members of ARACIS and evaluators. The Panel was told that one of the general weaknesses that evaluators encountered was that the self-evaluation reports that were provided by universities and other higher education institutions as the starting point for evaluations tended to be descriptive and lacking in self-critical evaluation. The Panel **recommends** that ARACIS should continue to work with universities and other higher education institutions to support and enhance their capacity for self-evaluation.

Reflecting on the current procedures that ARACIS employs to follow-up its evaluations the Review Panel **recommends** to ARACIS and its stakeholders for the new evaluation methodology to require a concise report after two years to the relevant Permanent Commission (with indications of supporting evidence) that shows how institutions have responded to their institutional and programme evaluation reports and require evaluators to comment in the subsequent evaluation report on the changes that have taken place since the previous evaluation.

Fully compliant

<u>Recommendations</u>

ARACIS should

- enhance its follow-up procedures for all completed evaluations, to require a concise report after two years to the relevant Permanent Commission (with indications of supporting evidence) that shows how institutions have responded to their institutional and programme evaluation reports (page 27); and that the <u>new</u> evaluation methodology should require those evaluating programmes and institutions to include in their reports an analysis of how the subject of the evaluation has responded to the previous external evaluation and the effectiveness of the actions taken (page 27)

- continue to work with universities and other higher education institutions to support and enhance their capacity for self-evaluation (page 27)

4.1.8   ESG Part 2.7 Periodic Reviews

ESG Reference: 2.7 Periodic reviews **ENQA Criterion 1 cont.**
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.
Guideline(s): 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.

The SER and discussions with members of ARACIS, evaluators, and students' representatives provided the Review Panel with plentiful evidence that since 2009 ARACIS has continued to organize a very substantial programme of external programme and institutional evaluations that had required commendable intelligence and hard work to deliver. The Panel considers that the relatively rigid scheduling requirements that ARACIS has been obliged to follow might, however, have made the delivery of its activities unnecessarily challenging and had possibly been wasteful of its limited resources.

As ARACIS begins to plan for the introduction of its new evaluation methodology, the Review Panel **recommends** that it should propose to the Ministry and its stakeholders that the statutory period for reviews be amended in order to confer greater flexibility and enable ARACIS to manage its workload more efficiently.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Fully compliant

<u>Recommendation</u>

That ARACIS should

- propose to the Ministry and its stakeholders that the statutory period for reviews be amended in order to confer greater flexibility and enable ARACIS to manage its workload more efficiently (page 28)

4.1.9   ESG Part 2.8 System-Wide Analysis

ESG Reference: 2.8 System-wide analysis **ENQA Criterion 1 cont.**
Standard: Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.
Guideline(s): 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

Between 2009 and 2012 ARACIS developed three system-wide analyses of "Quality assurance in Romanian higher education in the European context. The development of the quality of academic management at the systemic and institutional level". The findings of this project were published serially as three issues of a "Quality Assurance Barometer – the Status of Quality in Romanian Higher Education", published in November 2009, January 2011, and November 2011. Summaries of the first two reports had been translated into English and were provided as Annexes to the SER (see Annex 2 of this report, page 46). The Summary of the third report (November 2011) had not been translated into English at the time of the review and was not provided as part of the supporting material. The Review Panel urges ARACIS to take steps to have the Summary of the third Quality Barometer report translated into English so that it can be published on the Agency's website.

The "Quality Barometer" Reports were produced as part of the three-year EU-funded and ARACIS administered ACADEMIS Project which had come to a close in 2012. The Quality Barometer Reports are multi-disciplinary, multi-author reports undertaken for ARACIS by a team of Romanian academics working as consultants. The Reports were based on analyses and conclusions drawn from a mix of qualitative and quantitative information.

Members of the Review Panel read the Summaries of the 2009 and the January 2011 reports with interest. Judging from the contents of the Summary the first report had covered

- academic quality and academic quality assurance mechanisms

- an analysis of the state of quality in Romanian higher education

- a comparison of data about the Romanian higher education system and other European higher education systems

- issues and critical concerns for Romanian higher education.

The second Quality Barometer Report provided

- a general view of Romanian higher education

- an analysis of differentiation in the teaching and learning processes in Romania

- University quality assurance practices

- conclusions and policy recommendations

Among the conclusions drawn by the authors of the first Summary Report was that unless significant and rapid corrections were made to the Romanian higher education system the state risked "having less efficient universities, more and more diplomas, less individual professional skills, and finally, a chronic lack of European competitiveness".

The conclusions drawn in the second Summary Report, which focused on University quality assurance practices, included that the systems of funding and accreditation operated by Romania had encouraged regression towards the "minimal standard levels" rather than overall quality improvement. Hence, according to the authors of the Report, under the legal framework for higher education that had been agreed in 2006 "the law tends rather to reward formalism and compliance with the standards, and does not support to the same degree an endogenous process of developing an internal system of quality assurance". This had led to "homogenisation … in the missions of universities (codified in University charters), in internal mechanisms and procedures of quality assurance … or in other internal regulations (for instance, those regarding University ethics), as well as with respect to the ways in which programs and teaching and learning processes are organised...."

The Review Panel had these and other statements in the Summaries of the Quality Barometer Reports in mind when it discussed the future development of evaluation methodologies by ARACIS (see above) and when it met and spoke to members of ARACIS, students, evaluators, officials, employers, and Rectors during the site visit.

The Review Panel met two of the principal members of the project team that had produced the Quality Barometer Reports. It was told that ARACIS had played a critical and constructive part in the development of the project and that the project team had been able to follow and interpret the evidence it had gathered without hindrance. The project team was aware that some of the conclusions reached in the Quality Barometer Reports had been challenging for ARACIS (as the SER acknowledged) but considered that ARACIS had shown considerable strength and courage in publishing the Reports and in promoting them widely, through peripatetic open-access "road-shows" to the various regions of Romania, and through publishing them on the Agency's web-site.

The wider scope of the EU-funded ACADEMIS project, under which the project that had led to the Quality Barometer Reports had been undertaken, was outlined in the SER. It had included

- study visits to other ENQA partner agencies that had included ARACIS staff and stakeholders

- nomination of "mission scientific secretaries … to give assistance to review panels for institutional evaluations

- periodic meetings with university leaders and staff responsible for quality in universities

- additional training sessions for external evaluators and members of ARACIS staff

- the development of a new quality evaluation methodology (see above)

- nationwide quality assurance forums and conferences for the 110 accredited Romanian Universities

Under the ACADEMIS project ARACIS has organized Conferences to improve internal quality assurance procedures in higher education institutions (in 2011 seven Conferences were organized for the 110 accredited Universities) and, following the recommendations made in the 2009 ENQA review report, ARACIS has developed a database with information of input, process, output and outcome indicators of 46 Universities. The current European-funded project SeECIS: EEducation System for Quality Evaluation in Romanian Higher Education—" which is now being implemented by ARACIS will extend data collection and develop further research on the evolution of quality assurance outcomes in Universities.

The Review Panel considers that among other matters, the work undertaken by ARACIS through the ACADEMIS project has enabled it to produce analytical reports on the state of higher education in Romania of the first order, and support real improvements to quality arrangements in higher education in Romania. The Panel **recommends** that ARACIS should continue to seek out further opportunities to bid for external funding to support research into areas such as the changing needs of students (which will also enable it to continue to work more closely with students) and undertake further system-wide analyses of Romanian higher education.

The Review Panel considers that the Quality Barometer reports represent an outstanding and **commendable** series of publications that has provided valuable insights into the state of higher education in Romania and that they deserve to be more widely known in Romania and further afield. The Panel **recommends** that ARACIS should consider how it might make the Quality Barometer reports more widely known.

Conclusions

Fully compliant

Recommendations

ARACIS should

- seek external funding to undertake system-wide analysis projects on Romanian higher education, including projects with students which will require the more active participation of students (page 31)

- take steps to make the "Quality Barometer" publications more widely known (page 31)

4.2 ENQA criterion 2 / ESG 3.2: Official status

ESG Reference: 3.2 Official status
ENQA Criterion 1 cont.
Standard: Agencies should be formally recognized 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.

Guideline(s): -

Through meetings with senior Government advisers, Rectors, students and other stakeholders the Review Panel was able to confirm that ARACIS is recognised by the Romanian Government, its Ministries, Departments, and agencies and by the higher education sector in Romania as the sole body authorised to carry out reviews of higher education provision other than in the area of doctoral programmes.

In 1993 the Law of Accreditation empowered a National Council on Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) to provisionally authorize (license) and then accredit higher education institutions. The Review Panel was told in several meetings that in this framework almost all the standards applied in the processes were input measures and were formulated in quantitative terms.

In 2005 an Emergency Governmental Ordinance on Quality Assurance in Education was drafted. It laid down a general evaluation framework for both pre-university and university education and provided for the establishment of two agencies to evaluate higher education and school-based education respectively. The two agencies are ARACIS and ARACIP (the Romanian agency responsible for quality assurance in school-based education). The legislation requires ARACIS to focus on quality assurance in higher education while also taking into consideration the procedures outlined and operated for schools by ARACIP. The 2005 Ordinance sought to apply a similar approach to school-based and higher education, based on learning outcomes.

ARACIS started work in 2005 in place of CNEAA, under the provisions of a Government Ordinance which was adopted (with some amendments) by Parliament in 2006 as Law 87/2006. At the time of this review, the 2006 legislation provided the framework for quality assurance in education as a whole, while also referring specifically to quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. The Review Panel noted that both the 2005 Ordinance and Law 87/2006 had been drafted to accord with what were the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area approved by ENQA at Bergen in 2005.

In 2011 the Law that amended Emergency Government Ordinance no. 75/2005 strengthened the capacity of ARACIS by enabling it to hire new permanent staff to cope with its increased workload, and made provision for two student representatives to participate as full members of the ARACIS Council rather than as observers as had been the case until April 2011.

Conclusion

Fully Compliant

4.3 ENQA criterion 3 / ESG 3.4: Resources

ESG Reference: 3.4 Resources   **ENQA Criterion 3**
Standard: Agencies should have adequate and proportionate resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organize and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures *and staff (Addition by ENQA for ENQA criterion)*
Guideline(s):

Financial resources

ARACIS is financed through several income streams. Its evaluation activities are financed by the fees it is authorised to charge the universities and other higher education institutions. The level of fees is determined by ARACIS itself and submitted to the Ministry of Education for its approval. The Ministry may reject the proposal from ARACIS but may not amend it. The summary of accounts for ARACIS was provided as part of the additional information that the Review Panel requested before the site visit. They show that for evaluation activities ARACIS is able to manage within its budget.

In order to undertake developmental and research activity ARACIS seeks project funding from external sources. Recent successful bids for external funding have included support from EU structural funds for the ACADEMIS and SeECIS projects.

Well qualified independent Romanian observers commented to the Review Panel on the added value ARACIS was able to contribute to the quality of higher education in Romania through the research and development activities it undertook. The Review Panel fully endorses this view and, as noted earlier, recommends that ARACIS should continue to seek external sources of funding to support its research and development activities (see also ESG Part 2.8 System-Wide Analysis, page 29.

Human resources

In 2009 the ENQA review report commented sympathetically on the difficulties that ARACIS was experiencing arising from the growth in its activities and the expectations placed on it with a staff complement that was capped at 35 persons. In April 2011, as noted elsewhere, this cap was lifted through an amendment to the 2005 legislation that established ARACIS which enabled it to increase its staff complement to a level where it can responsibly manage its substantial programme of evaluations. At the time of the present review the total "technical" staff establishment of ARACIS according to its organizational chart was 51, together with an Executive Board of five persons.

In the course of the site visit the Review Panel met a group of the technical staff to discuss how they had been appointed, inducted and the staff development opportunities open to them. The Panel was able to confirm that all staff appointments at ARACIS are required to be publicly advertised and that appointments are subject to formal selection procedures. The Panel also learned

that technical staff are aware that they need additional and continuing professional development in languages and in Information Technology.

The Review Panel recognises the good sense of these suggestions and commends them to the Executive Board and Council of ARACIS for their attention.

Conclusion

Fully compliant

4.4 ENQA criterion 4 / ESG 3.5: Mission statement

ESG Reference: 3.5 Mission statement   **ENQA Criterion 4**
Standard: Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement
Guideline(s): These statements 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 statements 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 statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

The goals and objectives of ARACIS are clear and publicly available on its web site. The Review Panel learned that they are used by the Agency in its strategic planning. The SER stated that the "mission statement and the activity of ARACIS are in accordance with the legislative regulations in force in Romania and that based on the Mission statement the "four key-concepts that underline ARACIS' work [are] - quality (constant review and enhancement of quality, including of its own activities), information and transparency (informing stakeholders and the public, by periodical reports on the state of quality of the HE sector), co-operation (both with HEIs and similar QA-agencies), European and international relevance and visibility (by co-operating with other relevant European and international bodies)." The SER continued "Therefore, based on that mission statement, the key activities of ARACIS are related to setting standards (performance indicators, benchmarks), quality improvement services to the academic community and providing information to the public, to other stakeholders and participants (including students) of HEIs and study programmes."

The Review Panel found these statements to be functionally sufficient as a high level legalistic description of the tasks ARACIS undertakes but considers that the present "mission statement" does not convey the commitment to improvement shared by staff, Council members and evaluators that it met. As ARACIS moves towards its third decade of work it might now find it timely to review whether its present statement of activities adequately conveys the direction it wishes to follow to become even more able to meet the needs of its stakeholders and Romania.

Fully compliant

4.5   ENQA criterion 5 / ESG 3.6: Independence

ESG Reference: 3.6 Independence **ENQA Criterion 5**
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
Guideline(s): 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

Operational independence from higher education institutions and government guaranteed by official documents

The SER provided clear guidance to the Romanian legislation and regulations that guarantee the independence of ARACIS. English language translations of the 2005 and 2011 Laws were available to the Review Panel which was able to confirm the terms in which the independence of ARACIS is stated.

The Review Panel discussed the topic of the independence of ARACIS during the visit with several groups including the Executive Board of ARACIS, University Rectors and representatives of the Government. The attention of the Panel was repeatedly drawn to the turbulence of the years immediately following the downfall of the previous regime and the fear among many Romanians that official decisions would be taken (as under the previous regime) in an unaccountable and corrupt fashion. Since 2005 ARACIS has been the beneficiary of the farsightedness of the officials and political leaders who drafted the legislation that has guaranteed its independence. At the same time the steady leadership of its Executive Board has vigorously defended the integrity of the Agency's decisions against those that would impugn them.

Autonomous definition and operation of the procedures and methods followed by ARACIS

The Review Panel was able to confirm that while under the procedures laid down in the 2005 legislation and linked regulations, it is the Ministry of Education, on behalf of the Government that makes accreditation decisions on the basis of

advice provided by ARACIS, and that the Ministry may reject the advice it is given but cannot make a different decision without advice from ARACIS. Likewise in the development of the new evaluation methodology it is for ARACIS to propose the methodology and the Ministry to accept or reject it – the Ministry cannot change the proposed methodology unilaterally. The Panel was told by a Government representative that under the present Government and its predecessors, no proposal from ARACIS had been rejected. The Panel is confident that the appointment of evaluators and the conduct of evaluations is carried out by ARACIS independently of the Ministry of Education, other Romanian agencies and the institutions and universities that are evaluated.

The Review Panel recognises the importance of this finding since the present statutes of ARACIS require its Council members and Executive Board to be drawn from the higher education sector. Members of ARACIS told the Panel that it was intended to make a wider cross-section of the academic community eligible for appointment to the Council of ARACIS and improve the representation of the various subject domains and secure a better gender balance. The Panel was also told that applicants for appointment as a member of the Council were subject to a rigorous selection procedure including interviews and presentations in two languages. The ARACIS Council elects its own Chair.

Conclusion

Fully compliant

4.6   ENQA Criterion 6 / ESG 3.7: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members

ESG Reference: 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies
ENQA Criterion 6
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, (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.
Guideline(s): 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

As noted above, the current evaluation Methodology that ARACIS has employed since its first evaluations in 2006-7 is fully consistent with the Standard. The Methodology is published on the Agency's web site, together with the "Evaluation Guides" that the evaluators refer to, and the criteria employed by the evaluators (with the exception noted in ESG Part 2.3 Criteria for Decisions, page 16) are likewise published on the ARACIS web site.

ARACIS has adopted a formal procedure for appeals against the findings of its evaluations which was provided for the Review Panel in an Annex to the SER but did not appear to be available on the English language version of the Agency's web site. This is a matter to which ARACIS will need to attend.

Conclusion

Fully compliant.

4.7   ENQA Criterion 7 / ESG 3.8: Accountability procedures

ESG Reference: 3.8 Accountability procedures
ENQA Criterion 7

Standard: Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

Guideline(s): 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
- 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.

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. (Addition by ENQA for ENQA criterion)*

The Review Panel is confident that ARACIS operates within the requirements set by the relevant legislation. The Agency has adopted a "Code of Professional

Ethics in the Evaluation Activities for the Authorisation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in the Field of Higher Education in Romania", which was provided for the Panel as an Annex to the SER and which, it was informed, is available on the ARACIS web site. The "Code of Professional Ethics" sets out the values and principles that ARACIS expects its staff and evaluators to follow, together with "Rules of Conduct" for evaluators that include definitions of what would constitute a conflict of interest debarring an evaluator from participating in an evaluation (see above, page 18) and a requirement for confidentiality with respect to the conduct of evaluations and the work of ARACIS. The quality control measures that ARACIS has adopted for its reports are described on page 22.

The Annex the SER that contained the Code of Professional Ethics refers to the establishment of a "Permanent Commission of Ethics and Moral integrity (CEIM)" to serve as an advisory committee to the ARACIS Council, to monitor the use of the Code of Professional Ethics and provide advice on matters that infringe it. Code of Professional Ethics uses the future tense to describe the establishment of the CEIM but ARACIS was able to arrange a meeting for the Review Panel with its three members. Each is a senior academic with policy experience and experience of ARACIS; as group they operate to ensure the independence and integrity of the evaluations that ARACIS undertakes. They could not, however, remember a formal process of being appointed to this important Commission which had been formed shortly before the visit of the ENQA Review Panel in 2009.

The Review Panel does not doubt that ARACIS works hard to ensure the integrity of its actions and ethical standards in the conduct of its evaluations and other activities. Nonetheless there is room for improvement. The membership of the Permanent Commission of Ethics and Moral integrity is not listed on the ARACIS web site and there is a need for ARACIS to communicate to stakeholders more clearly how it ensures and assures its independence and the general integrity and consistency of its processes; the Panel **recommends** that ARACIS should attend to this matter forthwith.

ARACIS has developed a formal statement of its internal quality assurance system which it provided for the Review Panel as an Annex to the SER. This is a simple four-page catalogue of the documents that ARACIS views as providing its overall quality assurance framework. It refers to a Quality Manual as a "presentation of ARACIS' mission, policy and processes" but the Panel was not able to locate this document on the English language version of the ARACIS web site. This is an important document that should be readily available to staff, students and evaluators and in its absence the Panel was not able to check what it was told about the quality measures followed by ARACIS against the latter's formal procedures. The Panel **recommends** that ARACIS publish its Quality Manual on its web site forthwith.

Conclusion

Fully compliant

Recommendations

That ARACIS should

- publish its "Code of Professional Ethics in the Evaluation Activities for the Authorisation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in the Field of Higher

Education in Romania" and its Quality Manual in easy-to-find locations on the its web site forthwith and likewise publish the membership of its "Permanent Commission" (page 38-39)

4.8 ENQA Criterion 8: Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims

ENQA Criterion Reference: ENQA Criterion 8
ESG Reference: N/A
Standard/Guideline(s): N/A   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 judgments 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.*

The Review Panel does not doubt that ARACIS pays careful attention to its principles at all times. The procedures described in ESG Part 2.5: Reporting, (see page 22 above), whereby the conduct of programme and institutional evaluations are subject to multiple layers of scrutiny and supervision help to ensure that as far as this is possible decisions and judgements reached by different groups of evaluators are arrived at in a consistent manner. The Panel considers that as ARACIS puts into practice the new evaluation methodology it is preparing it would be helpful for it to describe the procedures that it will follow to ensure that judgements are reached in a consistent manner on its web site to increase the transparency of its operations.

Appeals procedure

Before the site visit the Review Panel asked ARACIS to provide it with information about the appeals that had been lodged against the outcomes of its evaluations. The information provided stated that there had been 32 appeals against provisional authorization for bachelor programmes; 36 appeals against the accreditation of bachelor programmes; nine appeals against the outcomes of periodical evaluations; 33 appeals against the accreditation of master programmes; and five appeals against the outcomes of external institutional evaluations. In the time available during the site visit the Review Panel was unable to enquire into what appears to be a relatively high level of appeals against the findings of ARACIS evaluations. As ARACIS enters its next programme of activities it will no doubt wish to publish on its web site an analysis of the grounds cited for appeals against its evaluations and findings.

An Annex to the SER provided details of the appeals procedure for external evaluations of institutions. This limits the grounds for appeals to errors in the way the evaluation was conducted; failures to follow the prescribed procedures; and failure to follow ethical rules, such as conflicts of interest. No equivalent

procedure for programme level evaluations was brought to the attention of the Review Panel. If there is no published procedure for appeals against programme evaluations this would represent a gap in the Agency's current arrangements to which it should attend.

Work with ENQA

The Review Panel noted that ARACIS had hosted the ENQA General Assembly in Bucharest in October 2011 and that a senior member of ARACIS was a member of the ENQA Board. The Review Panel is satisfied that ARACIS is committed to continue to participate in the work of ENQA to the extent that its resources allow.

Conclusion

Fully Compliant

5   CONCLUSION AND DEVELOPMENT

In Romania the independent status of ARACIS, and of its decision-making is guaranteed by law. Throughout the present review the ENQA-appointed Review Panel was able to see the evidence of how the mechanisms work that ensure the independence of ARACIS and to hear from senior figures in ARACIS, Government and higher education that the need for ARACIS to maintain its independence is widely respected.

ARACIS is a key contributor to the development of the Romanian system of higher education and its capacity to influence the character of that development can be seen in the number of former evaluators and members of its Permanent Speciality Commissions who have become Rectors, Vice-Rectors, Deans and Heads of Departments in Universities and other higher education institutions. The Agency sees itself as having helped to define curricula, improve teaching and the promotion of quality assurance in higher education. The Review Panel would not disagree with that view. There is, however, as always with quality in higher education, scope for further improvement in the way ARACIS works with the higher education sector in Romania, including with students and, of equal importance, with employers, former students, and those who may become students at some stage.

There is an overarching theme to many of the recommendations in this report which is that ARACIS should strive for greater transparency, through communicating its activities and the findings of its evaluations to non-specialist audiences and through publishing information about itself, its procedures and those who contribute to its work, on its web site, and in ways that make that information more readily available.

5.1   Overall Findings

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the Review Panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, ARACIS is in Full Compliance with the ENQA Membership Provisions in all areas other than ESG2.3, "Criteria for decisions", where it is in Substantial Compliance and the Panel has made recommendations which, if put into effect would bring ARACIS into full compliance.

The Review Panel therefore recommends to the Board of ENQA that it should consider confirming Full Membership of ENQA for ARACIS for a further period of five years.

The external Review Panel draws the following conclusions:

ENQA criterion 1/ ESG Part 2	
ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures	Fully compliant
ESG 2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes	Fully compliant
ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose	Fully compliant
ESG 2.5 Reporting	Fully compliant
ESG 2.6 Follow up-procedures	Fully compliant
ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews	Fully compliant
ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis	Fully compliant
ENQA criterion 1/ ESG 3.1, ESG 3.3: Use of External Quality Assurance in higher education	Fully compliant
ENQA Criterion 1/ ESG 3.1, ESG 3.3: Activities	Fully compliant
ENQA Criterion 2/ ESG Reference: 3.2 Official status	Fully compliant
ENQA Criterion 3/ ESG Reference: 3.4 Resources	Fully compliant
ENQA Criterion 4/ ESG Reference: 3.5 Mission statement	Fully compliant
ENQA Criterion 5/ ESG Reference: 3.6 Independence	Fully compliant
ENQA Criterion 6/ ESG Reference: 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes	Fully compliant
ENQA Criterion 7/ ESG Reference: 3.8 Accountability procedures	Fully compliant
ENQA Criterion 8 Consistency of judgments, appeals system and contributions to ENQA aims	Fully compliant

5.2   Commendations and recommendations

The Review Panel commends the following features

- the hard work and intelligence that ARACIS has devoted to organizing and conducting a very substantial programme of external programme and institutional evaluations (page 28)

- the publication by ARACIS of the Quality Barometer reports, an outstanding series of publications that has provided valuable insights into the state of higher education in Romania that deserve to be more widely known in Romania and further afield (page 31)

The Review Panel makes the following **recommendations**. That ARACIS

- should plan to involve students fully as evaluators in its forthcoming new methodology for programme evaluations (page 11) and the work of permanent and speciality commissions (page 13, page 20)

- consider the benefits for students and stakeholders for there to be a main report on each university and higher education institution with the possibility to report additionally on programme domains at each institution where relevant (page 13)

- continue its work to provide support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions to adopt an improvement focus to their work on quality assurance (page 13)

- continue to improve gender representation at all levels of the work of ARACIS (page 13)

- make more widely known its establishment of a 'stakeholders advisory committee' and consider how to involve social partners, such as employers organisations and trades unions in its work, so that there is a body formally empowered to advise the Council of ARACIS on how to ensure that the Agency's valuable work is better known to stakeholders, and advise the Council on how to respond to the needs of stakeholders for information about higher education and higher education institutions in Romania (and further afield) (page 13)

- ensure that as well as any additions that the Council of ARACIS approves to the criteria its evaluators are required to employ in making their judgements, that criteria required to meet the requirements of a professional body are referred to on the ARACIS web site (with a web link) and brought directly to the attention of those to whom the criteria will be applied (page 16)

- with the introduction of its new evaluation methodology provide further specific and separate face-to-face training sessions for programme and institutional evaluators, to be supplemented by training via its VLE (page 19)

- publish all its evaluation reports (including, eventually, those for evaluations already completed) on its web site as individual searchable documents that include the necessary authentication details (page 24)

- for its new evaluation methodology ARACIS should broaden its view of the intended readership of its reports at programme and institutional levels to embrace potential students and employers of Romanian graduates (page 24)

- should develop shorter and clearly written reports in accessible language specifically for potential students and employers of Romanian graduates (page 24)

- should undertake a research exercise to identify the information that students and employers need to draw on in order to identify programmes and institutions when making choices, and consider the possibility for institutional evaluations of issuing a main report with the flexibility to report additionally on programme domains (page 24)

- should group the reports of programme evaluations and institutional evaluations that have already been published on the ARACIS web site, so that all programme evaluation reports for a particular university or other higher education institution can be viewed and accessed on the same web page(s) and that this should also be a feature to be considered when ARACIS reports produced under the new evaluation methodology are presented on its web site (page 24)

- be prepared enhance its Information Technology arrangements to enable it to deliver improved performance, storage and organisation of data and the ARACIS website (page 24)

- strengthen the existing links between the Chairs of the Permanent Commissions and the Council through creating a new advisory committee of Chairs of the Permanent Commissions (page 26).

- enhance its follow-up procedures for all completed evaluations, to require a concise report after two years to the relevant Permanent Commission (with indications of supporting evidence) that shows how institutions have responded to their institutional and programme evaluation reports; and require in its new evaluation methodology that those evaluating programmes and institutions include in their reports an analysis of how the subject of the evaluation has responded to the previous external evaluation and the effectiveness of the actions taken (page 27)

- continue to work with universities and other higher education institutions to support and enhance their capacity for self-evaluation (page 27)

- propose to the Ministry and its stakeholders that the statutory period for reviews be amended in order to confer greater flexibility and enable ARACIS to manage its workload more efficiently (page 28)

- seek external funding to undertake system-wide analysis projects on Romanian higher education, including projects with students which will require the more active participation of students (page 31)

- take steps to make the "Quality Barometer" publications more widely known (page 31)

- publish its "Code of Professional Ethics in the Evaluation Activities for the Authorisation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in the Field of Higher Education in Romania" and its Quality Manual in easy-to-find locations on the its web site forthwith and likewise publish the membership of its "Permanent Commission" (pages 38-39)

ANNEX 1 - SCHEDULE FOR THE REVIEW VISIT

Tuesday, June 18, 2013

Meeting Location	Time	Participants
ARACIS Council Room	09h00 –10h00	ARACIS Board: Prof. Ioan Curtu, Prof. Adrian Miroiu, Prof. Mihai Aristotel Ungureanu, Prof. Radu Mircea Damian, Prof. Mihai Octavian Popescu
ARACIS Council Room	10h15 - 11h00	ARACIS QA Department: Prof. Radu Mircea Damian*, Prof. Adrian Lungu, Prof. Romiţă Iucu, Prof. Stefan Szamoskozy, prof. Iordan Petrescu
ARACIS Council Room	11h15- 12h00	ARACIS Accreditation Department: Prof. Mihai Octavian Popescu*, Prof. Radu Oprean, Prof. Lazăr Vlăsceanu, Conf. Cristina Ghiţulica
ARACIS Council Room	12h15 - 13h00	ARACIS Chairs of Permanent Commissions: Prof. Ianoş Ioan; Prof. Baias Antoniu Flavius, Prof. Anca Buzoianu (Institutional), Prof. Roman Cristina (Economics), Prof. Oltean Stefan – Univ. Babes-Bolyai (humanistic)
	13h00 – 14h:00	LUNCH – Catering at ARACIS headquarters followed by free time for the experts panel
ARACIS Council Room	14h00 - 15h00	ARACIS evaluators: Prof. Mihaela Gheorghe (Humanities), Prof. Vichi Stanciu (Performing Arts), Prof. Mihai Florin (Economics + Distance Learnig), Prof. Lache Simona (Engineering), Prof. Danciulescu Daniela (Informatics), Ciocîrlan Doiniţa – economics + inst, Doicin Cristian (Engineering),
ARACIS Council Room	15h15 –16h00	ARACIS Staff: Oana Sarbu, Marcu Mihai, Mihaela Bajenaru, Carmen Mirian, Mihai Floroiu, Tanase Ion, Camelia Vasile
ARACIS Council Room	16h15 –17h15	Rectors: Prof.George Darie (state), Univ. Politehnica Bucharest; Prof. Ovidiu Folcuţ – Romanian - American University of Bucharest (private); Prof. Ioan Abrudan – „Transilvania" University of Braşov (state); Prof. Daniel Breaz – „1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia (state); Prof. Doina Frunzăverde – „Eftimie Murgu" University of Reşiţa (state); Prof. Ovidiu Puiu – „Constantin Brâncoveanu" University of Piteşti (private), (state), Prof. Vasile Isan, Univ. A'.I.Cuza" Iasi (state); prof. David Laszlo, Univ. Sapientia (private, Hungarian); prof. Pavel Nastase, Academy of Economic Sciences Buc. (state); prof. Andy Pusca, Univ."Danubius" Galati (private); prof. Dan Dediu, National Academy of Music Buc. (state)
ARACIS Council Room	17h30 - 18h15	Conf. Mihai Paunescu, Bogdan Florian (Persons who contributed to "Quality Barometers")
ARACIS Council Room	18h15 – 19h15	Meeting of the panel (team members only

Wednesday, June 19, 2013

Meeting Location	Time	Participants
Ministry of National Education	09h00 – 10h00	Remus Pricopie, Minister of National Education
ARACIS Council Room	10h15 – 11h15	Students' representatives: Mihai Dragos – (Universitatea din Bucuresti); Cristi Popescu (Universitatea Tehnica din Cluj-Napoca); Ana Maria Radoi (Universitatea 'Politehnica' din Timisoara); Rocsana Zbranca (Academia de Studii Economice – (all ANOSR); Sheila Abdulamit (Universitatea POLITEHNICA Bucuresti); Ciorei Mihaela Andreea (Universitatea « Constantin Brancusi » din Targu Jiu) ; Mirica Andreea (Academia de Studii Economice din București); Pricope Ruxandra (Universitatea POLITEHNICA Bucuresti) - (all UNSR); Koen Geven (former ESU representative in the Review Panel of ARACIS); Mihai Vîlcea (doctoral student); Koen Geven (international student evaluator, former ESU representative in the Review Panel of ARACIS)
ARACIS Council Room	11h30 – 12h15	Representatives of the Stakeholders Committee and other employers: Mugur Tolici, National Bank of Romania; Cristian Erbasu, Construction Industry; Sorin Mândruţescu, Oracle România; Savu Dorin, BRD ; Cristinel Bulearcă, IBM Romania; Paul Mărăşoiu, Peacock Hotels;
ARACIS Council Room	12h30 – 13h30	Advisory Committee: Prof. Dinu Airinei, Prof. Solomon Gheorghe, Prof. Al. Popovici, Prof. Gaspar Dumitru,
	13h30 – 14h15	Working lunch
ARACIS Council Room	14h15 – 15h00	Remaining questions to ARACIS Executive Board: Prof. Ioan Curtu, Prof. Adrian Miroiu, Prof. Mihai Aristotel Ungureanu, Prof. Radu Mircea Damian, Prof. Mihai Octavian Popescu
ARACIS Council Room	15h00– 16h15	Private review panel meeting
ARACIS Council Room	16h30- 17h30	Final Meeting of the panel with members of ARACIS Executive Board
		*Prof. RM Damian and Prof. M.O. Popescu are Board Members and also Directors of Departments (according to the Law)

ANNEX 2 – SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Annexes to the SER

Annex 1	Law amending Emergency Government Ordinance no. 75/2005 on providing quality education
Annex 2	ARACIS progress report to ENQA following the 2009 review
Annex 3	ENQA acknowledgement of the contents of Annex 2
Annex 4	Government of Romania Decision on tariffs/fees for the conduct of reviews 'Decision No. 1731/2006 Of 06/12/2006 approving the higher education institutions' study programmes authorization and accreditation fees, and the fees for external evaluation of quality in education of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) Published in the Official Gazette, Part I No. 988 of 11/12/2006
Annex 5	Emergency Ordinance No. 102/2006 Of 13/12/2006 Amending the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 75/2005 on quality assurance in education
Annex 6	Methodology for External Evaluation, Standards, Standards of Reference, and List of Performance Indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
Annex 7	Activities Performed. Number of study programs evaluated by ARACIS until February 26, 2013;
Annex 8	ARACIS Quality Barometer 2009 - Summary
Annex 9	ARACIS Quality Barometer 2010 - Summary
Annex 10	The Code of Professional Ethics in the Evaluation Activities for the Authorisation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in the Field of Higher Education in Romania
Annex 11	List of agencies visited in the strategic project "Quality assurance in the Romanian higher education in European context. Development of academic quality management at system and institutional level" managed by ARACIS
Annex 12	Modifications of the [Methodology] Guide – Part III: 14. Settlement of appeals proceedings.
Annex 13	General Presentation of ARACIS' Internal Quality Assurance System

Annex 14	Formation of Quality Evaluators Workshops/Training sessions for Internal Evaluators:

Additional information requested from ARACIS before the site visit

A calendared schedule of a) the programme reviews and b) the institutional reviews undertaken by ARACIS since 2009.

An explanation of the grounds on which provisional authorisation is recommended by ARACIS for higher education institutions in Romania.

Information on how ARACIS addressed the recommendation in the 2009 ENQA report on developing the criteria followed by ARACIS when reviewing and reporting on programmes and institutions to enable greater differentiation of outcomes.

An explanation of the process that is used by ARACIS to select experts and assign them to a) the programme reviews and b) the institutional reviews.

A tabulated statement of the number and names of student reviewers that have been trained by ARACIS and have participated in a) the programme reviews and b) the institutional reviews, together with the identity of the relevant programmes and institutions.

Clarification whether there is a national register of study programmes. Could you clarify that matter for us, please?

A tabulated statement, by name, of the number of international experts who work with ARACIS, together with their current employing institution and their nationality.

A tabulated list of stakeholder organisations, other than universities and student bodies with which ARACIS regularly and currently works.

An explanation of the changes to the procedures of ARACIS that have been made in response to Romanian Law no. 1/2011 on National Education

An explanation of the part ARACIS is playing in the delivery of the National Reform Programme, including:

• the development of the National Qualification Framework in Higher Education

• the creation of a National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education, and

• the development of institutional rankings for universities.

Information on access by ARACIS to Structural Funds under "KAI 1.2: Quality in higher education" and "KAI 1.5 Doctoral and postdoctoral programmes" under the National Reform Programme?

English translations the executive summaries for ARACIS's budgets for 2011-12 and 2012-13.

An explanation of how ARACIS and EUA work on institutional evaluations

Examples of the work ARACIS has undertaken to strengthen the development of "quality cultures" in Romanian higher education institutions following the recommendation in the 2009 ENQA report.

Training of (internal) institutional and programme reviewers, information on how this has been followed up by ARACIS to see if it has been effective.

Examples of how stakeholders in higher education (including universities and other higher education institutions, employers, and students and their parents) make use of ARACIS reports on programmes and higher education institutions.

Illustrations of how stakeholders like employers now play a greater role in the evaluation and QA process.

Illustrations of how ARACIS provides information for stakeholders in higher education in Romania, other than the universities and higher education institutions, about the "condition" of Romanian higher education such as the "quality barometer" reports.

How universities and other higher education institutions in Romania make use of ARACIS reports to improve the higher education they provide for students and their conduct of research.

Information on how the review procedures followed by ARACIS encourage improvement and report on it when they find examples.

The procedures followed by ARACIS when reviewing programmes and higher education institutions that the Romanian state has designated as multicultural and multi-language universities.

Information, please, on the "services related to HE quality assurance and accreditation" provided by ARACIS?

The fee levels that ARACIS is permitted to charge for its reviews, what they are, and how frequently they are subject to review.

Information on the appeals have been lodged against the outcomes of ARACIS evaluations undertaken since 2009.