

ARACIS New Methodology for the External Evaluation of Quality of Higher Education - Increased Relevance, Quality Culture and Enhancement Orientation

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) introduced [*a new Methodology for the external evaluation of the quality of higher education*](#), which became effective on February 9, 2025. The Methodology was developed in accordance with [*the Law of Higher Education no. 199/2023*](#) and based on [*the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)*](#).

Given the fact that, since 2005, the Methodology has undergone only several minor revisions, in order to keep it fit for purpose, a major revision process was started in 2019. Public consultations with all relevant stakeholders were initiated within the project “Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating quality standards (QAFIN)”, which included five regional conferences conducted between 2019-2020, and continued in 2024. Only in meetings were discussions undertaken with over 400 higher education stakeholders.

As a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), as well as a quality assurance agency registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), since 2009, ARACIS „should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG” (*Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies*). In 2021, ENQA introduced a new type of external review for the agencies meeting certain conditions, *the targeted review*, „that focus on the remaining challenges in reaching ESG compliance, while at the same time further strengthening the enhancement part of the review, thus offering a shorter and more resource-mindful review process” ([*Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews*](#), p. 4). As part of the targeted review, the agencies need to select one further enhancement area from among standards of Part 2 or 3 of the ESG.

Because the eligibility criteria for a targeted review were met, ARACIS opted for this type of review and *Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose* was selected by the agency as the enhancement area (described within [*the ARACIS Self-assessment Report*](#), pp. 17-23) in the ENQA 2022-2023 targeted review, which provided meaningful insights for finalising the revision process ([*ENQA External Review Report of ARACIS*](#), pp. 38-39).

The four main aims of the Methodology are consolidation, relevance, simplification, and quality culture and enhancement.

The new Methodology consolidates the existing quality assurance system, based on 31 years of experience with external quality assurance (EQA) processes in Romania.

The Methodology aims to increase the relevance of EQA processes by focusing more on learning and teaching while strengthening the learning outcomes role, and considering the mission of the Higher Education Institution (HEI).

It also brings an important simplification of procedures, by introducing two new types of institutional evaluations (Audit and Simplified evaluation) for HEIs complying with certain conditions and reducing the number of standards and performance indicators (1/3 for programs/domains, respectively 1/2 for institutional level, compared to the previous methodology). The Simplified evaluation uses benchmark standards and performance indicators proposed by HEI in relation to its mission.

The new Methodology fosters the quality culture and is enhancement oriented by consolidating follow-up procedures and the role of recommendations/ commendations and increasing the role of the internal quality assurance, through self-accrediting master programmes and introducing Audit.