AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR
THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Membră cu drepturi depline în Asociația Europeană pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior - ENQA
Înscrisă în Registrul European pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior - EQAR

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AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR
REGISTRATURĂ
Nr. 6319
20 15 luna 09 ziua 30

Bucharest, 30 September 2015

Mr. Padraig Walsh
President
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Subject: ARACIS Follow-Up report

Dear Mr. Walsh,

I am pleased to let you know that the ARACIS Follow-Up Report on the actions the agency has undertaken, as well as on those which are still in progress, to meet the recommendations of the final review report of the agency in 2013 endorsed by the ENQA Board, was approved by the ARACIS Council in its meeting on 24 September 2015.

The ARACIS Follow-Up report is attached to this message.

We thank you and ENQA for the support given to ARACIS.

Sincerely yours,

ARACIS President,

Prof. univ. dr. eng. Iordan Petrescu

ARACIS FOLLOW-UP REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2015

1. Introduction

Following the ENQA letter to ARACIS on 28 November 2013 and the decision of the ENQA General Assembly Full membership of ENQA was granted to ARACIS for five years from the decision of the Board meeting on 28 October 2013.

The Board requested a follow-up report by October 2015 to include the actions ARACIS has undertaken to meet the recommendations made in some areas by the external review panel. In particular, ARACIS was encouraged to strive for greater transparency, communicating its findings to non-specialist audiences, publishing more information about itself, on its website and in ways that make that information more readily available.

The structure of this Progress Report is meant to facilitate the mission of the ENQA Board to evaluate how the recommendations of the Review Panel are addressed by ARACIS, keeping in mind that in the Review Panel Report in several cases the same recommendations appear in different places. Therefore, in this Progress Report they are presented related to the problem they refer to, starting from the list of recommendations as stated in the last part of the Review Panel Report and from other relevant recommendations mentioned in the text of this Report.

ARACIS has drafted this follow-up report bearing in mind that the next external review will give special attention to these points.

2. Addressing the Recommendations made in the Report of the Review Panel

2.1. Involvement of students and stakeholders

The Review Panel made the recommendations that ARACIS should plan to involve of students fully as evaluators in programme evaluations and 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.

2.1.1 Improving Regulations, Procedures and Mechanisms

ARACIS recognise the importance of this recommendation and it is fully involved in its implementation, which is also part of the process of transition towards the implementation of the new ESG approved by the Ministerial Conference held in 2015 in Yerevan. ARACIS already started to involve students fully as evaluators at all levels; as per the current procedure, evaluation of HE institutions is performed with participation of students, who have also the possibility to look at some study programs, if they are in their study field(s), based on information provided by the students unions, which started already in 2013, such as the one communicated by ANOSR on 14.07.2013.

As we had explained to the Review Panel, involvement of students in all panels raises the problem of availability of large numbers of students *trained* and *willing* to take part in missions during the semesters. Although student unions give ARACIS full support, they mentioned difficulties to find students available to evaluate a large number of study programs per year (for Bachelor level (1st cycle - "licenta") study programs the total number of external evaluations was in 2014: 275 and in 2015 -501). The student evaluators must also be scientifically compatible with the subject of the study program, and the student availability must not cause delays in the time schedule of the evaluation. At the same time, there is also the problem of *costs* since the agency cannot raise the level of fees universities pay for evaluation of study programs; such raise requires a Government Decision. At the moment, ARACIS decided to involve students and other stakeholders in the work of the Permanent Specialty Commissions, as the Council has already approved in 28 November 2013. This decision shall be fully implemented when the new Methodology is finalized and approved by Government Decision.

To this end the Internal By-Laws of ARACIS were modified to allow for inclusion of students in the work of the Permanent Specialty Commissions – The Regulation on the Organization and Functioning of ARACIS - http://www.aracis.ro/cadrul-legislativ/

Also, the "Procedures for accrediting/periodic external evaluation of the Master study programmes" were approved (applicable from 28.04.2014 http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Comunicate_Media/2014/Proceduri_privind_acreditarea_sau_evaluarea_periodica_a_domeniilor_de_studii_universitare_de_master.pdf). The procedure specifies that in the evaluation team for accreditation/periodic evaluation the

presence of a student is obligatory. This exercise did not yet begin since work on the detailed procedure is still in progress.

2.1.2 Support and training of student evaluators

To address the problem of large number of student evaluators needed to be involved in all levels of evaluations, which is also related to the application of the new ESG, ARACIS has organized training sessions for students, in cooperation with the three student unions recognized at national level. In 2015 the most recent training session was hosted by the University Vasile Alecsandri of Bacau in the period 13 - 17 March. The total number of students trained was 70. ARACIS covered the costs for 40 students and the participation of 30 students was supported from the project QUALITAS (http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/) funded from European structural funds.

The National Register of ARACIS external evaluators (Registrul National al Evaluatorilor ARACIS, RNEA) was completed with a section dedicated to student evaluators (Registrul National al Evaluatorilor ARACIS – studenti, RNEA-S http://www.aracis.ro/organizare/registrul-national-de-evaluatori/).

2.2. Support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions

The Review Panel made the recommendations that ARACIS 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. Also, the Review Panel recommended that ARACIS continue to work with universities and other higher education institutions to support and enhance their capacity for self-evaluation.

Support and training for the staff of universities and other higher education institutions is now an important activity of the Agency. In September 2013 ARACIS, as partner in the project "Specific Quality Standards and performance indicators for Higher Education in Health Care" Contract POSDRU/18/1.2/G/40067, contracted by the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Iuliu Hatieganu" of Cluj-Napoca, was actively involved with presentations and practical work to a training Workshop organised by the university in Coltesti, Alba County, with participation of representatives of staff involved in quality assurance from medical universities in Romania. The objectives of the event were: AIII.1 Formation of specialists in quality assurance at the level of European standards in each university implied in the project and AIII.2 Workshops in which experts can draft projects to develop and made the quality management more efficient to enhance the capacity of universities to provide better educational services.

In the period 12 - 14 December 2013, ARACIS has organized in Cluj-Napoca a training session for university staff working for Distance and Part-Time study programs.

- In 2014, under the framework of the project QUALITAS (http://www.aracis.ro/?id=536) a planning for training activities for university staff was put in place. Accordingly, three training sessions were organised in 2015 for representatives of universities working in their internal quality assurance structures, acting also as "self-evaluators" (in the project QUALITAS they are specified as "internal evaluators"). The training sessions were organised in Bucharest (19 - 20 March, hosted by University Politehnica Bucharest; 86 participants from 21 universities located in Bucharest), Timisoara (2-3 April, hosted by the University Politehnica Timisoara; 35 participants from 11 universities located in the development regions West and South-West), Alba Iulia, 7-8 May, hosted by the University "1 Decembrie 1918" of Alba Iulia; 27 participants from 5 universities located in the development regions Centre, North-West and North-East). The training sessions included presentations (http://www.aracis.ro/?id=536), discussions, self-evaluations and proposals from the participants for new quality indicators and standards, evaluation of the training session. The proposals from the participants shall be considered for the new set of standards and performance indicators which are currently being developed for the new Methodology, under the framework of the project QUALITAS. Also, a section of the training programme was dedicated to practical support to enhance the capacity of university representatives for self-evaluation, including best practice - examples of good Self evaluation reports and indentifying commonly met errors in drafting SERs.

2.3. Reporting; greater transparency, communicating findings to the non-specialist audiences

The Review Panel recommended that ARACIS 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.

This recommendation was analysed by ARACIS, since its phrasing induced some confusion, but the Review Panel did not react to our remarks and hence it was retained in the Panel report. According to the Methodology in force, the agency evaluated study programmes and institutions. However, the concept of evaluation of programme domains was endorsed and ARACIS for Master programmes. To this end, the Specific Procedure for the External Periodic Evaluation of Accredited Master Study domains (in the following parts of the document shall be referred to as the "Specific Procedure" or (SP)) was approved in 2014 by Ministerial Order, Published in the Official Gazette, Part I nr.236/2014: http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/OM_nr._146_din_2014.pdf. The detailed ARACIS Procedure, following the approval of the Specific Procedure, was approved by ARACIS Council to make operational the provisions of the Specific Procedure approved by Ministerial Order.

This document was published on the ARACIS webpage http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Comunicate_Media/2014/Proceduri_privind_evaluarea_domeniilor_de_master_08.04.2014_-_FINAL.pdf (in Romanian) and presented to all Rectors with the Occasion of the Rectors Conference Meeting in 2014, before the procedure was due to be applied. The roll out of the new methodology for evaluation the Master Study domains is however a longer term process, which has just began. The roll out of the Specific Procedure is in its initial phase and full implementation is scheduled to be finalized in 2018. ARACIS will be expected to make a Substantive Changes Report (SCR) for EQAR once the new **methodology for accreditation and evaluation of master domains has been finalized and is being rolled out, which is not yet the case.** The roll out of **(I)** *Procedure for external periodic evaluation of the Master Studies domains* has not began yet, with the exception of the fulfillment of ARACIS obligation to inform universities about the dates at which the Specific procedure for Master Study domains shall start, for each individual university. Procedures **(II)** *Procedure for external evaluation for accreditation of a new Master Study domain COMMENT:* a **new** Master Study domain is defined as a domain in which the university does not have any accredited Master Study program and **(III)** (*Procedure for inclusion of a new Master Study domain in an accredited Master Study domain.* are the only type of activity for evaluation of Master Study domains ARACIS has run in 2014 and 2015, based on the existing methodology for external evaluation of Master Study programs.
The agency shall draft and publish reports on evaluation of Master domains when the methodology for accreditation and evaluation of master domains has been finalized and is being rolled out. These reports would not always be connected with institutional evaluations, mainly because the evaluation of Master domains shall be still performed at different moments of time. At the moment we estimate that evaluation of Master domains will begin to be performed together with evaluations of institutions in 3 years time.

The Review Panel recommended 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. Also, the Review Panel recommended that *ARACIS should develop shorter and clearly written reports in accessible language specifically for potential students and employers of Romanian universities graduates .*

In its letter to the Review Panel dating 29.08.2013, ARACIS clarified, as a factual comment the following: “The section 4.1.6 of the Report is very useful for further improvement of reporting, which is a problem not only of this agency, but of many others; this was discussed during the visit of the panel and we explained why ARACIS reports should at the moment still be detailed and well supported by facts, which could induce the idea they are ”technical” and more difficult to be understood by the general public; this may be true, but it must at least be mentioned that the Report of the students is published in full as well as the Report of the foreign expert and

these are more synthetic documents and contribute well to the purpose of making Reports more ”reader friendly”.

ARACIS already started to implement of this practice by starting to draft concise summaries for all institutional reviews (the first 2 reports have been discussed in the Evaluation Department as examples of good practice). Moreover, in its meeting on 29.08.2013, ARACIS Council committed itself that the agency will continue drafting a shorter and clearly written report in accessible language addressed to the general public. As of 28.11.2013 this document became a general practice.

To this end a template was developed and approved by the Council. However, there is still a certain delay in its full implementation. On the ARACIS website the “Summary Report”(“Raport de sinteza”) for institutional evaluations, as part of the Institutional Evaluation Report (“Raport de evaluare institutionala”) is already published (in Romanian) for some universities and shall be published also in English. For the universities evaluated under the project QUALITAS the Summary Reports were sent out for official translation and shall be published as printed brochures and on the website before the end of 2015 to complete the version in Romanian. This procedure shall be applied for all universities evaluated by ARACIS: http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari-institutionale/

The Review Panel recommended that ARAQCIS 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.

In the comments ARACIS sent to the Review Panel it was stated that to post the reports on the agency web-site is the only possibility to have SIGNED and SEALED documents, the only kind of documents which are considered as “official documents” and therefore compatible to type of documents, such as word or pdf documents not signed and sealed are likely to have no value for the reader. We are currently working on how to implement the proposed solution, which would be much easier to be searched, keeping in mind the difficulty and required time needed to change this traditional mentality of the public. This aspect is still to be considered for the new Methodology. In spite of this difficulty, the search on the website search was made easier. For instance, the study programmes reports for 2012 could be found on: http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari/evaluari-single/view/arhiva2012/242/?tx_ttnews%5BpS%5D=1376833496&cHash=706de10585, for 2013, reports are posted after each evaluation in tabular format (Examples:

http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari/evaluari-single/view/hotarari-28032013-2/103/; http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari/evaluari-single/view/hotarari-24042013/103/ etc.), http://www.aracis.ro/rezultate-evaluari/evaluari/

Also, the Review Panel recommended 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.

In its Council Meeting on 28.11.2013, ARACIS committed itself to establish two partnerships with students' representatives and stakeholders' representatives respectively in order to undertake 2 different research projects to identify the information that students and employers need when making choices. The agency already has a precedent of involvement in research of students needs through its partnership in ESU's QUEST project (http://www.esu-online.org/asset/News/6068/QUEST-for -quality-for-students-publication-Part1.pdf)
This exercise is part of the project QUALITAS in which the questionnaires includes many questions to investigate on students and employers opinions. The project must be completed by the end of 2015. The collected data shall be processed and used as factual proof for reporting and publishing on the website.

2.4.Gender representation

The Review Panel recommended that ARACIS continue to improve gender representation at all levels of the work of ARACIS.

In its *Procedure of selecting and appointing of new members of the Permanent Speciality Commissions* (adopted in January 2014 Council Meeting) "gender balanced representation" is stated as one of the principles in the selection procedure.
In the Ministerial Order no. 3084 dating 23.01.2013 regarding the procedure of selecting, through public competition, of the ARACIS Council members, "multiculturality and gender balanced representation" is stated as one of the four main selection criteria.

The selection of new ARACIS Council members was performed in 2014 by an international selection panel, based on this procedure. In the panel, Chaired by the president of the Romanian Academy, ENQA was represented by the President Padraig Walsh and ESU by the Board member Blazhe Todorovski. Presently, in the ARACIS Council the percentage of women is 26.3% as compared to 20% in the previous composition. In the 13 Permanent Speciality Commissions the total percentage of women is 31%, but the repartition is uneven, ranging from 8 women of 11

members to four commissions with no women representation. This situation partially reflects the differences in the presence of women in some study fields but it is still a matter of concern and further work of the agency.

2.5. Criteria for evaluations

The Review Panel recommended that ARACIS ensure that any additions that the Council of ARACIS approves to the criteria its evaluators are required to employ in making their judgements are prominently advertised on its web site and brought directly to the attention of those to whom the criteria will be applied.

We think this recommendation originated from a misunderstanding during the Review Panel visit, which was commented by ARACIS, but the panel kept it as such in their report. The fact is that all the criteria are published on the site IN ROMANIAN – the link is www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/Standarde_specifice_ale_comisiilor_de_specialitate.zip.

2.6. Enhancing Information technology; more readily available information

The review Panel recommended that ARACIS be prepared enhance its Information Technology arrangements to enable it to deliver improved performance, storage and organisation of data and the ARACIS website.

This recommendation was a result of the Review Panel finding that ARACIS had a problem with addressing modern IT opportunities and facilities. After analysis of the origin of this problem it was found that lack of adequate competent staff was preventing the expected development of the website, publication if reports etc. At the moment of the visit, the agency had one position for one part-time staff member.
The first step regarding this recommendation was already taken: ARACIS has organized two public competitions and hired full-time an additional IT specialist as of 01.11.2013. However, the full review of the website shall be commissioned to a specialized firm in the next period of time. At the moment, a revision included the project QUALITAS as a distinct section on the website.

ARACIS commits itself to finding a solution which would either encompass a combination of searchable documents and picture-type pages so that would safeguard the legal requirements (signature and stamp), or to publish a second version of the same full reports that allows a search option. The agency is well aware of the ensuring transparency dimension of quality assurance as well as of the big volume of information that lies within the agency reports which can be useful for stakeholders and prospective students.

2.7. Follow-Up procedures

The Review Panel recommended that ARACIS *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**].***

Also, the Review Panel recommended that ARACIS *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.*

There are several points to be mentioned on this particular recommendation, structuring them on institutional and programme level segments:

a. Up until now, when referring to institutional evaluations, universities were focused on the recommendations offered by ARACIS by three instruments:

- The institutional external evaluation report encompasses (among others) recommendations aiming at progressive enhancement of quality of universities processes and practices.
- When taking note of the institutional external evaluation report, the university is requested to provide a short declaration of acceptance of the evaluation panel's conclusions. This declaration contains the presentation of the evolution registered after the site visit and, particularly, actions taken or proposed (next to estimated deadline and person(s) responsible) for the implementation of the recommendations contained by the review report.
- After the cycle evaluation is completed, the evaluation panel analyses if the recommendations given in previous evaluations are implemented and which is their effects.

In December 2006, ARACIS has published the *Guide for quality assurance activities at programme and institutional level* in 6 volumes. Part 3 has two additional procedures to be mentioned: a year after the external review the university produces a letter that informs the agency about the way in which observations and recommendations given in the report were taken into account. Secondly, three years after the review the agency deploys a short site visit in order to analyze together with the university the progress registered since the external review and to discuss the institution's intentions on quality management issues. However, ARACIS can say that these two procedures were not fully respected until now.

Therefore, ARACIS will: 1. Underline to the expert reviewers the importance of the ”follow up” segment so that they give substantial recommendations at the end of each institutional evaluation. 2. Draft a new procedure so that universities submit after two years a concise report that includes an analysis of how did they respond to the previous external evaluation, how were the recommendations implemented and which was the effectiveness of the actions taken. 3. Train the review panel members to have a greater focus on the steps taken by the university after the first review so that to have a continuous and coherent enhancement led approach.

b. When referring to programme evaluations, ARACIS will:

- Underline to the reviewers the importance of the ”follow up” segment so that they give substantial recommendations at the end of each programme evaluation (and domain evaluations in the future).
- Draft a new procedure so that programme representatives from universities submit after two years a concise report to ARACIS for the relevant Permanent Commission that includes an analysis of how did each programme respond to the previous external evaluation, how were the recommendations implemented and which was the effectiveness of the actions taken.
- Train the evaluation panel members to have a greater focus on the steps taken by the university after the first review so that to have a continuous and coherent enhancement approach. This action already started.

This action plan was approved in ARACIS Council meeting on 28.11.2013. As a consequence, for the institutional evaluations the number of recommendations is now significant and their implementation is taken into consideration in the next external evaluation. The findings appear clearly in the Reports of the Evaluation Department based on the findings of the evaluation panels.

These measures were presented to “external evaluators” (ARACIS experts listed in the National Register of Evaluators) during the three training session which were held by ARACIS in 2015 under the framework of the project QUALITAS, as well to the “internal evaluators” (representatives of the universities working in quality assurance university structures (see also para. 2.2).

For study programme evaluations this practice must still be improved. In that sense, the Council adopted recently a Decision (24.09.2015) which reinforces and clarifies these procedures: the experts should, in institutional as well in study programme evaluations, offer to the institutions a relevant number of recommendations. In the next evaluation, the experts should look, as a

priority, at the degree of how the recommendations were addressed. Also, the universities should forward, in two years time from the decision of the Council, to the Permanent Specialty Commissions a brief report on how the recommendations of the ARACIS experts were addressed.

2.8. Organisational problems

2.8.1 New structures recommended by the Review panel

The Review Panel recommended that ARACIS 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.

In the Review Panel report it is stated that "Members of the Council of ARACIS may be members of one or more Permanent Speciality Commissions and through such dual membership be able to represent the Council's views to the Commissions and vice-versa". The agency sent the panel the comment showing that this was a misunderstanding – the members of the ARACIS Council are NOT members of the Speciality Commissions but they are members of one of the ARACIS Departments (Accreditation and Evaluation)! What has been discussed and explained to the panel was that the Council members are following the works of the Speciality Commissions by participating at their meeting sessions without having the right to vote! This participation aims at unifying the views of the Specialty Commissions and to improve consistency of applying the criteria; therefore, we do not see the need of a new structure as a new advisory committee – as per the recommendation of the panel which would induce more bureaucracy, an unnecessary intermediate link and also further costs.
Moreover, ARACIS believes that the agency already has a complex organization chart; the levels of decision making in place are meant to assure consistency of decisions; the agency has in addition 2 consultative structures. Creating a new structure is, from our point of view, bringing an unnecessary burden to the activity of the agency and would also induce additional costs.

Therefore, ARACIS will not take this recommendation into account to establish a new structure, but will once again underline to the member of the Council the importance of their participation at the Permanent Commissions meetings.

The Review Panel recommended that ARACIS 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).

This recommendation is still being implemented; it can be implemented indeed after the stakeholders` representative in ARACIS Council will be nominated. At this moment, the agency is waiting for the decision of the stakeholders` federations.

2.8.2 Statutory period for reviews

The Review Panel recommended that ARACIS 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.

From the preliminary discussions with the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research it resulted that this recommendation has a long term policy implication and shall be considered when appropriate, most likely with the occasion of the approval of a new Methodology.

2.9 Additional external funding

The Review Panel recommended that ARACIS 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.

ARACIS is beneficiary of two projects co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013.
The general objective of these projects is to contribute to the enhancement of the quality assurance in Romanian Higher Education, through the development of an organizational culture centered on a continuous quality improvement within higher education institutions and on managerial skills training at institutional and system level. These two projects are the following:

1. *"The development and the consolidation of the quality culture at Romanian Higher Education system – QUALITAS"*, in partnership with Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/).

   The specific activities of the project are:

   - external institutional quality evaluation of 20 public and private universities from Romania;
   - development of new indicators for the quality evaluation and compatibility at system level;
   - system-wide analysis of quality assurance in the Romanian Higher Education;
   - internationalization, training and exchange of good practices for main actors in quality assurance at institutional and system level, communication in the Romanian Higher Education quality assurance.

2. *"Virtual community for quality assurance and improvement in strategic and innovative management in the technical and composites universities, in order to increase the relevance of higher education to the labor market – ACAD-INOV"*, in partnership with four Romanian universities and one Romanian IT company (http://acad-inov.trp.ro/).

   The specific activities of the project are:

- establishing, developing and strengthening of a network between partner universities to form an academic community of good practice;
- development of specific assessment tools;
- development and implementation of the IT tools for management and quality assurance;
- training of the staff from quality assurance committees in universities.

ARACIS is also partner in two European Union Lifelong Learning projects, as it follows:

1. „Impact Analysis of external Quality Assurance Processes of Higher Education, Pluralistic Methodology and Application of a Formative Trans-disciplinary Impact Evaluation - IMPALA" – the implementation period: 2013-2016, contracted by Evalag - Mannheim, Germany (http://www.aracis.ro/?id=501), in which ENQA is an active partner.

The objective of the project is to develop and apply a methodology for analyzing the impact of external quality assurance procedures (External Quality Assurance - EQA) on higher education institutions and to provide information on the results, expectations, outcomes and impact of external quality assurance procedures in higher education in the partner four European universities.

2. „Automatic Control Quality Tool System – AQUA.TS", contracted by Superficie 8 S.R.L. - Perugia, Italy (http://www.aquatsproject.eu/index.php?lang=en).

AQUA.TS is a two-year (2013 – 2015) Leonardo da Vinci (Development of Innovation) project which aims to design, build and implement operational tools for measuring and control of indicators in the framework of EQAVET in collaboration with target groups and stakeholders.

2.10 Quality Barometer

The Review Panel *recommended that ARACIS take steps to make the "Quality Barometer" publications more widely known* .

The drafting of a new Quality Barometer is one main objective of the project QUALITAS, as a part of the Work-package 4 - "System-wide analysis of quality assurance in the Romanian Higher

Education". In this Work-package, there research is in progress to outline the perceptions of the employers, teachers and students towards the policies and the quality of the Romanian Higher Education. The results of this research will be included in the Quality Barometer and published in electronic and hard-copy formats and widely distributed (200 hard copy brochures in Romanian and English).

2.11 Code of Professional Ethics in the Evaluation Activities for the Authorisation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in the Field of Higher Education in Romania

The Review Panel recommended that *ARACIS 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 ARACIS web site forthwith.* Also, the Review Panel found that *the membership of the Permanent Commission of Ethics and Moral integrity is not listed on the web site and, likewise, the Code of Professional Ethics does not appear to be available on the web site.*

The revised version of the Code of Ethics (also translated into English) was published on ARACIS website at the following link: http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Informatii_publice/ARACIS_Code_of_ethics_EN.pdf

The composition of the "Permanent Commission of Ethics and Moral integrity", renamed by the Council Decison as the "Permanent Commission of Ethichs" is published on the web-site and can be found at the link http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie__Proceduri/2014/Componenta_Comisie_permanenta_de_etica.pdf.

The revision of the Quality Manual of ARACIS, as part of the Internal Quality Assurance process, is currently in progress and shall be published on the web-site after approval by the Council.