

EURASHE Seminar on the Implementation of internal and External Quality Assurance

24-25 October 2013, Bucharest, ROMANIA

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA: THE EXPERIENCE OF ARACIS

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What the ministers decided (Bergen 2005):

- *“We adopt the **standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area** as proposed by ENQA. We commit ourselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis, while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria”*
- *“We welcome the principle of a **European register of quality assurance agencies** based on national review. We ask that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by **ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB** with a report back to us through the Follow-up Group”*

What the ministers decided (London 2007):

- “We welcome the **establishment of a register** (i.e. EQAR) by the E4 group (...) The register will be **voluntary, self-financing, independent and transparent**”
- “Applications for inclusion on the register should be evaluated on the basis of **substantial compliance with the ESG**, evidenced through an independent review process endorsed by national authorities, where this endorsement is required by those authorities”

What happened in Romania

- First effects of Bergen: Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on Quality in Education approved later by Law no. 87/2006 and modified afterwards:
 - **Covers pre-university AND higher education national system;**
 - **Establishes two new agencies: ARACIP (for pre-university, ministerial, state funded) and ARACIS (recognition of ESG's for higher education: independent, self funding).**

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- **ARACIS** had to take over from the former **CNEAA** (established by law in 1993 under the authority of the Parliament):
 - **Premises;**
 - **Permanent Staff – by selection procedure;**
 - **Archives;**
 - **Experienced peer reviewers;**

but also:

- **A different paradigm of QA in higher education – centered on accreditation;**
- **Image – good and ... bad;**
- **Actions in court ... as defendant!**
- **Unfinished evaluation work.**

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The first year – 2005

- 1 st Provisional Council with hybrid structure: nominations by Senate (5) + Ministry of Education (5) + National Rectors Council (5);
- Missions:
 - **organize selection procedure for permanent staff;**
 - **organize selection procedure for the next composition of the Council (3 yrs. mandate);**
 - **finalize formalities to take over facilities and archive;**
 - **prepare the Government decision for the methodology.**
- Result – almost nil, no activity, no evaluations performed.

The second year 3/4 (Painful!) – 2006

New law, approving the GEO no. 75/2005 with some amendments;

- 2nd Provisional Council with hybrid structure: nominations by Senate (5) + Ministry of Education (5) + National Rectors Council (5):
 - **Process of taking over from CNEAA;**
 - **Election procedure of 5 members to continue as Council members;**
 - **Organize selection procedure for 10 new Council members.**

The second year 3/4 (Difficult!) – 2006

- Both GEO no. 75/2005 and Law no. 87/2006 specify the obligation of ARACIS to become listed in the EQAR in one-year time (fortunately it was not mentioned when was the “zero moment”!);
- “What register” in 2005 and 2006?

Law: OK

Media and other “friendly” comments: why ARACIS was not listed in the EQAR? “we know better” etc.

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The second year 1/4 (Better times!) – 2006

- The Methodology of evaluation approved - Government Decision no. 1418/September 2006;
- The evaluation guides:
 - **Study programs (Bachelor and Master degrees) accreditation external evaluation;**
 - **Institutional authorization/accreditation external evaluation;**
 - **Academic quality external evaluation of accredited higher education institution;**
 - **External evaluation of Teaching staff training departments (TSTD);**
 - **External evaluation of distance learning study programs (DL);**
 - **External evaluation of part time study programs;**
- The pilot project (10 + 1 universities).

The steady state: 2007 – PRESENT

- Study program evaluations:
 - **2765** master program evaluations (accreditation);
 - **1917** bachelor program evaluations (provisional authorization, accreditation, periodical evaluation)
 - **190** master program evaluations (accreditation – long distance and part time learning);
 - **310** bachelor program evaluations (provisional authorization, accreditation – long distance and part time learning);
- **80** universities were evaluated (out of which 46 in the ACADEMIS project, supported from EU Structural funds, managed by ARACIS);
- **7** universities are being currently evaluated (out of which **1** try to have the final judgment improved).

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External Evaluations of ARACIS:

- National level - performed by a Monitoring Committee in 2007;
- EUA and ESU evaluations in 2008;
- ENQA evaluation in 2008 – 2009: ENQA full membership granted in June 2009;
- Listed in EQAR in September 2009 (one year after the register was opened!).
- **Second ENQA coordinated review: panel visit in July 2013!**

Independence

- Modifications of the law 87/2006:
 - **funding (2007): no state subsidy, only contracts with beneficiaries and projects**
 - **number of permanent staff, premises, inclusion of two students as full Council members (2011)**
 - **additional modifications of the law – to guarantee even more independence (2012)**

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How stands ARACIS now:

- Sustainable funding – includes also EU funded projects
- Internal QA procedures amended and improved; evaluators trained and “quizzed electronically”; new committee of employers; no proposal of ARACIS overturned yet by the MNE etc.
- ENQA GA, October 2011 organized in Bucharest

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- Two students included as Council members
- System analyses of QA in HE for 2008, “Quality Barometers: 2009,2010, 2011”, at system level, followed by reports
- International activities: ENQA, CEEN, INQAAHE , other projects (i.e. QAHEQA etc.)
- In 2012, ARACIS was authorised to offer the EUR-ACE label - a certificate awarded to a Higher Education Institution in respect of each engineering degree programme which it has evaluated according with EUR-ACE Standards

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- **Problems raised and Lessons learned:**
 - **Political support needed - to continue as an independent agency**
 - **Still need for evidence-based decisions - society dominated by lack of confidence, rumors (sorry, not only!) of corruption, interest of local authorities to support some universities, coexistence of state and private universities (not always in a fair and healthy competition).**

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- IQA: Quality culture difficult to build!
 - Evaluation regarded as bureaucracy;
 - Negative decisions sometimes challenged;
 - Judgments to be on a larger scale to provide room for differentiation: from 3 to 4 “judgments”
- **Note (1): ARACIS has won in all court all cases in which decisions were taken! (Optimist’s view: don’t worry: other trials will come)**

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- **Note (2): small percentage of appeals:**

Bachelor study programmes (licenta): - **Provisional authorization:** 32 appeals from 368 evaluated programmes – **8,69% (15 appeals were accepted); Accreditation:** 36 appeals from 621 evaluated programmes – **5,79% (20 appeals were accepted);** Periodical evaluation: 9 appeals from 725 evaluated programmes – **1,24% (no appeals accepted); Total bachelor study programmes (licenta):** 77 appeals from 1714 evaluated programmes – **4,49% (35 appeals were accepted); Master study programmes:** - **33** appeals from 1527 evaluated programmes – **2,16% (9 appeals were accepted); Institutional evaluation:** – 5 appeals from **85** evaluated institutions – **5,88% (no appeals accepted)**

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- For the future:
- **New law of education** (February 2011) – does not modify law 87/2006 but opens all evaluations to any agency listed in the EQAR;
- **New proposal for Methodology** presented for public debate – shift to benchmarking procedures and to more output/outcome criteria, ESG as firm support;
- **New challenges, more pressure:** more complex mission, more co-operation needed to evaluate research and doctoral programs; classification of universities and ranking of study programs in the law: ARACIS will be involved in the future!;
- **Internationalization of QA in the EHEA** – competition BUT do not forget co-operation (EHEA is a space for co-operation, students and staff mobility !).

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Most important achievements

National: building confidence in ARACIS !
“Quality Barometers” as part of system
evaluation – 2009, 2010, 2011 indicate it clearly!
and EQAR listing : condition of survival (by law!)

European: ENQA full membership; EQAR
registration

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Conclusion:

- The local context extremely important!
- Work with universities to build quality culture and CONFIDENCE in the agency
- Do not forget the importance of political support but ... beware of local interests

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Is QA having an impact? (1)

Follow-up for institutional or programme evaluations is based on the rating obtained. At institutional level, for „limited degree of confidence“ and "lack of confidence“ ARACIS makes after one year a new external evaluation finalized by a clear report that shows how institution has responded to the previous institutional evaluation report and the panel comments in report on the changes that have taken place since the previous evaluation.

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Is QA having an impact? (2)

The self evaluation reports from the universities which ask for a second evaluation demonstrate very well how the review procedures followed by ARACIS encourage improvement:

“The mission and strategic objectives are supported by actions taken at top management level for development of the quality management system in the university, viewing the harmonization with the requirements of ARACIS methodology and standards for ensuring and assessing higher education quality”

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Is QA having an impact? (3)

*“..... the ARACIS Quality Assessment Department Report, about the teacher staff and the teaching job creation, refers to the need to **resize the teaching positions structures –those going beyond the requirements of the Statute of the teacher - and the research positions in order to be framed in the quality requirements and standards** and to restore, where appropriate, the balance between the number of teachers and students in accordance with the current standards, on the other hand.....”*

There are many other examples

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

