



To whom it may concern,

This document is realized by the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania - ANOSR and it is meant to give the reader a short description of our position in relation to ARACIS, to express some of our findings as an observing member in the Council of the Agency. We wish to post some of our concerns and suggestions for its future activity.

1. ANOSR's contribution to the workings of ARACIS during the past year.

- We have contributed to the realization of the first set of standards and guidelines. Among the standards that we have proposed for adoption and were accepted, the following we consider to be of most importance: the use of student centered teaching methods within HEI, the availability of flexible learning paths within study programs, career guidance and counseling offered by the HEI, the proper use of the ECTS system, the usage of student satisfaction surveys as an internal quality assurance mechanism, the degree of availability of learning resources, scholarships and facilities offered to students.
- We have argued in favor of students participating as full members within the external quality assurance of the first 10 universities.
- We selected applicant students using a set of standards and procedures (the standards, procedures and results have been made public) and we trained 80 students and then performed a further evaluation. Based on this and availability related to the evaluation schedule we appointed the 13 students that were part of the external QA process.
- The students that were part of the external evaluation put together separate reports that were presented to the evaluation teams that they were part of.

2. Following the publication of the final reports of the 10 pilot universities we have randomly selected 3 reports and performed within ANOSR a detailed evaluation of the reports themselves.

The conclusions of this evaluation are the following:

- **The external QA evaluation reports are not a real evaluation:** more than 70% of the text within the reports is either copy/paste-ed from the university's documents or is not objectively critical towards anything and does not lead to any kind of relevant evaluation phrasing. The paragraphs that do contain such evaluative phrasing account for less than 20% of the reports.
- **The reports are not believable:** they contain, almost entirely, positive aspects regarding the universities. Between 0-4% of the text is critical. The few suggestions implied are not based on any kind of facts or data.
- **The reports do not take all the standards into consideration:** when evaluating the reports we found that only one had the study visit notes attached; within these notes, 11 of the 43 standards were found to be missing completely. Within the reports these are either not addressed or are addressed in a superficial manner.



- **The recommendations are not relevant:** they are not based on the findings of the reports, are not specific and sometimes contradict other parts of the report.
- **There are massive contradictions** between the report of the mission director and the one of the students. In one of the three reports analyzed, the mission director contains only positive aspects regarding the university while the report of the student is 56% critical.

Regarding the process that led to the reports, we have discovered the following:

- The report of the foreign expert that was part of the team at the Aurel Vlaicu University is a half of page long.
- The foreign expert that audited the Polytechnics University of Bucharest describes, on a whole page in his report, his links to the university, which actually show a conflict of interests. He also performed the visit at an earlier date than the rest of the team.
- The reports were not discussed individually within the ARACIS Council and were voted all at once.
- The reports of the students were not taken into consideration, and the “high trust level without further visiting” was given, even in the cases where the student’s report shows plenty of concerns regarding the quality of the educational process.

In light of these findings, ANOSR considers the results of the evaluation to be unsatisfactory. We have requested the ARACIS Council a thorough analysis of these findings and that proper action is taken so that the agency will, in the future, be able to fulfill its mission fully.

We organized focus groups with the student evaluators and have gathered a rather long list of recommendations focused mainly on the training and assessment of experts and on the improvement of working procedures so that the outcomes of the external QA process to have the proper value and impact.

3. Conclusions

Our fears and hopes

We are concerned by the possibility that the 10 reports published during the pilot phase will be considered valid, although it is clear to us that the process leading to these reports has thought us a lot and leaves a lot of room for improvement. If this will be the case the benchmark for other reports is at a very low level and sets the stage for another 5 years until we will have some measure of quality of our HE system.

After evaluating the evaluation process we do not believe that the current set of standards and guidelines is to be the target of much improvement, but rather the way it is put into practice. There is a risk of allocating energy to solve “the wrong problem”. We believe the solution lies, for now, in the use of better procedures and the adoption of quality culture within ARACIS itself.

We also hope that the adoption of new procedures will also mean knowing how to make use of all the standards.

The impact of these 10 huge reports has been minimal. We hope that the work of ARACIS will not turn out to be just a new form of bureaucracy but a true catalyst of change in our HE system.



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As other sources of information point out, the internal QA processes within HEIs are not yet working in a proper way. We believe it is, in part, the responsibility of ARACIS to promote best practice within the system, so as to speed up the improvement process.

As result of the low impact that we felt our report has had on the ARACIS council, we are raising, for the first time, the issue of accountability regarding the institution itself.

Last, but not least, we hope to have our concerns taken into consideration and request to play a full role in the external audit performed by the EUA.