4.1 Quality assurance – developing dimensions of EHEA

"Modern and efficient higher education systems represent the foundation of an open, confident and sustainable society and a knowledge-based creative, innovative and entrepreneurial economy. The common efforts of Member States authorities, higher education institutions, stakeholders and European Union will be essential for the achievement of objectives established in this communication and will underlie the global success of Europe" (European Commission, 2011a). It is one of the key messages with which the decision-makers from „zero zone" of European Area identified the future actions. In this context we have the new profile of educational policies specific to higher education from the Preamble of Quality Barometer 2015.

The definition of the term "quality" is one of the difficult and repeated tasks of researchers from contemporary higher education. Many authors consider quality an evasive notorious concept (Gibson, 1996; Neave, 1994; Scott, 1994), slippery (Pfeffer & Coot, 1991), relative (Baird, 1998; Harvey & Green, 1993; Middlehurst, 1992; Vroeijenstijn, 1992; Westerheijden, 1990), dynamic (Boyle & Bowden, 1997) and multidimensional concept (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002). Other researchers approach quality as the embodiment of intrinsic and extrinsic elements (Ball, 1985; Barnett, 1992; van Vught, 1994). Yet, for other authors, quality is a philosophical concept which does not have a general theory in specialized literature (Green, 1994; Westerheijden, 1999).

The concept has undergone various and an ambiguous interpretation, therefore finding a universally accepted and comprehensive definition is not generally possible.

Vroeijenstijn (2006) comments that any definition of quality must take into account the points of view of different stakeholders. Following the same idea, Cheng and Tam (1997) describe quality as a system which represents the input, process and output of educational system, by offering services which fully satisfy both the internal and external stakeholders by meeting their expectations.

Other authors associate quality with the standards which must be fulfilled to achieve the satisfaction of customers (Ellis, 1993). Standards, in the opinion of Ashcroft and Forman-Peck (1996) refer to the minimal thresholds compared to which performance is judged. From the human capital perspective, Barnett (1992) correlates the quality of higher education both with educational development and educational achievements of students engaged in study programmes. Supporting this point of view, Dill (2003) associates quality with academic standards, defining them as specific levels of knowledge and skills which the students obtain as a result of their participation in higher education.

Vlasceanu et al. (2007) describes quality of higher education as a multi-dimensional, dynamic concept on several levels and which is related to the context of an educational model, the mission and institutional objectives and the specific standards

from a system, a programme or a subject.

There is a more and more present reason in specialized literature in the perspective of regarding quality as a culture (EUA, 2006; Harvey and Stensaker, 2008). Such a perspective recognizes the organizational importance of quality as transformation process, when each entity and individual is concerned and recognized the importance of quality. This conceptualization is related to the intrinsic features of higher education in which quality is regarded as a force which drives all the activities in an organization. From this perspective, the quality culture is conceived as an organizational culture which involves: (1) a psychological element of values, beliefs, expectations and common commitments to quality, and (2) a structural element or management with well-defined processes which continuously develop quality and coordinate the institutional efforts (EUA, 2006). Other authors perceive quality culture as an organizational culture which contributes to the development of an efficient care for quality (Berings et al., 2010). As Harvey and Stensaker (2008) argue, a quality culture cannot be constructed by ignoring the context in which it is.

As for quality assurance, there is a very complex discussion in literature. The reasons around the adoption of quality assurance depend on the various perspectives on what is considered “quality”. Therefore, a universally accepted conceptual framework for quality assurance in higher education does not seem to exist. For Vroeijenstijn (1995), quality assurance is a “continuous, systematic and structured attention to quality regarding its maintenance and improvement".

UNESCO (2004) describes quality assurance as a systematic evaluation of educational programmes to assure that acceptable standards for education, scholarships and infrastructure are maintained. Similarly, INQAAHE (2005) defines quality assurance as “all the attitudes, objects, actions and procedures which by their existence and use and together with the quality control activities assure that at each programme adequate academic standards are maintained and developed”. Wilger (1997) shares similar points of view, according to which quality assurance is a collective process by which the university guarantees the maintenance of quality of educational process at the standards which the university established.

Centrex (2004), on the other hand, defines quality assurance as a means by which an organization confirms that there are the necessary conditions for the students to achieve the standards established. Green (1994) claims that the quality assurance practice is considered important because it allows a university to become an educational organization. In this case, a great attention will be paid to the teaching-learning relationship inherent to quality assurance, outlining the pedagogic hypotheses. For Barnett (1992), quality assurance involves the decision to develop a quality culture in a higher education institution, so that all the persons involved are aware of their own contribution to the support and improvement of quality in institution.

In the global context of higher education, quality assurance is regarded as the implementation and continuous development of ethos, policies and processes which have the purpose to maintain and improve quality defined as articulated values and needs of stakeholders (Boyle & Bowden, 1997). Following the same perspective, Cheng and Tam (1997) observed that if higher education is regarded as a system,

then any quality assurance programme must focus on the evaluation of inputs, processes and outputs.

Quality assurance is regarded by other authors as a comprehensive term which covers all the policies, processes and actions by which quality of higher education is maintained and developed (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002).

The number of countries which had established clear external quality assurance systems before the adoption of Bologna Process is limited. The initiator countries are in Western Europe, including the United Kingdom, France and Netherlands (Westerheijden et al., 2005). By observing different starting points of higher education systems in these countries it is obvious that the introduction of similar quality assurance mechanisms had different effects on the institutional and individual autonomy of teaching staff, its extension in places where it was quite limited and at the same time increased the administrative control where the autonomy used to be substantial.

In Central and Eastern Europe, the states implemented accreditation as means of transition to the new curricula and to assure the standards followed by the fall of socialism. This type of accreditation was mainly based on the establishment of input standards (facilities, staff, standards for curriculum etc.). Most countries of Central and Eastern Europe founded separate quality assurance agencies responsible for these accreditations (Temple and Billing, 2003).

At the beginning of the ’90s, less than 50% of European countries carried out quality evaluation activities at supra-institutional level (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004). With the adoption of Bologna Process, almost all European countries adopted a quality assurance system: since 1999, 22 countries founded national quality assurance agencies, half of them being created since 2005 (Eurydice, 2010).

On the background of globalization, the passage to the new public management in many organizations and the requirements specific to Bologna Process, quality assurance became in the last two decades one of the omnipresent terms in higher education. Quality assurance, as policy instrument, became almost universal (Westerheijden, 2007), even if in idiosyncratic forms.

Thune (1996) reported the development during the ’90s, of systematic procedures for evaluation of higher education in several European countries.

What we call “Bologna Process” supposes a series of meetings and intergovernmental ministerial agreements which aim at creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The process was established as a central platform for integration of European higher education systems (Knill, Vögtle & Dobbins, 2013). Since 2014, 47 countries are considered part of European Higher Education Area.

Bologna Process is composed of a number of “lines of action” conceived to increase competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education in Europe. In independent evaluation of Bologna Process, Westerheijden et al. (2010) distinguish a series of strategic objectives – creation of a European Higher Education Area and promotion of European higher education system at global level – and operational objectives or “lines of action" related to a large extent to the curricular reform, the recognition of studies, quality assurance and mobility promotion. It is noteworthy that harmonization

of national policies was never declared an objective of Bologna Process. Ministerial press releases do not have legal value; on the other hand, the Process follows an open coordination method (Ruiter, 2010) and uses the voluntary identification of common objectives and criteria and instruments to achieve them.

Bologna Process consists of biannual conferences and is a transnational platform in which the ministers responsible for higher education from the Member States discuss the progress recorded and future priorities. Between the biannual conferences the national delegations and stakeholders meet in “follow-up groups" to develop strategies for achievement of Bologna Process objectives.

The European Commission became interested in quality assurance at the beginning of ’90s because of its potential for harmonization and internationalization of different higher education systems (Westerheijden, 2005) and funded a series of pilot projects in this field (van Vught and Westerheijden, 1993).

Quality assurance was put on the agenda of Bologna Process from the beginning. While in the original Communiqué of Bologna (European ministers responsible for higher education, 1999) a single vague reference was made to the “promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance in view of developing comparable criteria and methodologies", the importance of quality assurance increased with each and every subsequent ministerial Communique (Bischof et al., 2013). It was stated that in essence the quality of higher education was the main problem of Bologna Process since the start (Olbertz, Pasternack and Kreckel, 2001), point of view which was later confirmed by the European ministers in charge with higher education by Berlin Communiqué (2003). In 2001 “the ministers resorted to universities and other higher education institutions, national agencies and ENQA, in cooperation with similar bodies from the countries which are not members of ENQA, to collaboration for the determination of a common reference framework and disseminate the best practices" (European ministers in charge with higher education, 2001).

In 2003, the ministers agreed that the main responsibility for quality assurance should revert to higher education institutions and established the minimal elements for quality assurance at national level. In 2005, based on these elements and minimal criteria the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in higher education (ESG) were adopted. In 2007, the foundation of European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) was agreed (European ministers responsible for higher education, 2007). In 2009, the ministers encouraged the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs/CNC) and committed to elaborate a qualifications framework for EHEA. With the purpose of developing mechanisms for provision of more detailed information about the higher education institutions from the whole EHEA, the ministers requested the development of “multidimensional transparency instruments”, for these instruments to operate closely with the instruments of Bologna Process, especially with quality assurance and recognition of studies (European ministers in charge with higher education, 2009). In 2012, new quality assurance objectives were not formulated, but they emphasized the importance of efforts regarding the legal basis for cross-border activities of quality assurance agencies enrolled in EQAR, the development of National Qualifications Frameworks, transparency and recognition of studies. In addition, it was decided to revise ESG

(European ministers in charge with higher education, 2012).

In the last 20 years, the number of quality assurance agencies increased. The law requires the higher education institutions to develop internal quality management systems. The national qualifications frameworks are under development and quality assurance agencies and their staffs are more and more organized in networks such as ENQA or INQAAHE.

Until 2014, the European quality assurance architecture consisted of:

- Standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG), adopted for higher education institutions and for quality assurance agencies. Since September 2014, the revised version of ESG is available, which was officially adopted by ministers in May 2015;
- European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR);
- Qualifications Framework for EHEA and European Qualifications Framework (EQF);
- A large number of organizations of stakeholders who work (among other) with quality assurance (ENQA, EUA, ESU, EURASHE, Business Europe, Education International);
- The first multidimensional instrument for provision of information on quality (or rather “qualities") of higher education institutions at individual level – U-Multirank;

The creation of a European Higher Education Area transferred the quality assurance issue to European and international level. Bologna Process acted as an important “vector of change regarding the quality of coordination mechanisms" (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2005).

The presence of quality assurance in the activities of OECD, UNESCO programmes, the World Bank projects, in exchange of information and in the development of various networks and professional associations such as INQAAHE, ENQA and others offered to quality assurance strong presence in the discourse of international higher education policies (Singh, 2010).

One of the current trends identified by Salmi (2015) at global level in the field of external evaluation of higher education quality is the transformation of quality assurance structures and procedures to improve the way in which its functions are implemented. A revision of recent trends regarding the development of quality assurance from international perspective emphasized a few important issues. While the creation of national quality assurance structures became a universal trend, with few countries left without an adequate quality assurance system, it is difficult to discern a unique general trend regarding the relationship between the state and quality assurance agencies. We notice rather a mixed image with some countries which emphasize the supervision role of the state with the risk of compromising the independence of national quality assurance agencies, other countries which go for more autonomy given to agencies, and other states which make significant structural changes to improve the efficiency of the national quality assurance system.

At global level, we can distinguish three principles of responsibility of quality

assurance sector (*ibid*.). First of all, the relationship between the state and the quality assurance agencies must reflect a healthy balance between responsibility and independence, based on clear rules of commitment agreed by both Parties. While the state and society in general have a legitimate interest in quality assurance of higher education, especially in the countries where private and cross-border providers have multiplied, the quality assurance agencies have to enjoy a sufficient autonomy to fulfil their responsibilities in an efficient manner. The abuses must be avoided by both Parties: governments must not allow that the politics and lack of confidence affect their relationship with the agencies, and the agencies must not be too indulgent to providers of doubtful quality or too rigid towards innovative institutions.

Secondly, to make a significant difference, quality assurance should not focus on the way in which higher education institutions function, but on the educational results they achieve. In order to use the differentiation proposed by Stein (2005), procedural responsibility which is first of all concerned about rules and procedures, is less significant than substantial responsibility, which is focused on the essence of research, teaching and learning in higher education institutions. The first type of responsibility can be more easily monitored, but no doubt, it is much more relevant to focus on the second type, in spite of the complexity and difficulties involved by measuring the acquisition of competence, the achievement of learning results of students and added value.

Finally, the most efficient responsibility and accountability mechanisms are agreed between the quality assurance agencies and the higher education institutions by mutual agreement. This agreement assures a higher responsibility for the evaluation process and feedback, but also a full sense of responsibility for quality assurance instruments.

4.1.1 Bologna Process as promoter of a new European academic and professional identity in EHEA

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) determined a very close reporting and a very solid focus of European higher education on global perspectives and European identity. In the context of socio-economic development, the objectives which accompanied the major European Processes dedicated to changes in higher education (we take into consideration here the “initiated” Bologna Process) were substantiated on a set of European, regional and institutional policies and practices in connection with European professional dimension.

The change of expectations and challenges which the European university system will have to face in the next period, in order to achieve the objectives of “Europe 2020” Strategy, will align by the following landmarks predicted:

- EHEA will face a new diversity of university institutional landscape which will not cause more convergence in higher education systems;
- Contribution of higher education to development and smart, sustainable and inclusive growth must become effective and rhythmically related to visible and quantifiable indicators;
- The European higher education must bring a significant, visible and transparent

contribution to the economic growth agenda of EU and to enhancement of employability and economic productivity;

- The European higher education system will have to face the democratic and massification challenges (with opening to global analyses) and to diversification of entry and access routes;
- The higher education systems must have a high transparency towards the real economic performances and the goals of opening to society ("the third mission of European university")
- The new social dimension of higher education cannot be ignored – the new profile of student, his new expectations and estimated and anticipated reactions;
- The European higher education must answer the new changes and key implications of qualifications, competences and skills at European level and exploit the added value of academic mobility network;
- The higher education institutions must become pillars of European innovation processes as open and responsible research, innovation and development centres;
- It takes a new culture of academic, responsible and best-performing governance, and a new professionalization model of university manager;
- Internationalization will become the solution to the problem of global expansion of higher education demand of quality both for students and for teaching staff.

The details of this list of trends and priorities are found in extensive manner in the document "Supporting growth and jobs – An agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems: communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (European Commission, 2011b).

In a very substantial Ph.D. thesis, written by Ancuta Prisacariu (Prisacariu, 2015) it is shown that "Bologna Process" involved a series of meetings and intergovernmental ministerial agreements which aim at creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The process was established as a central platform for integration of European higher education systems (Knill, Vögtle & Dobbins, 2013). Since 2014, 47 countries are considered part of European Higher Education Area.

Exploiting her rich experience in quality assurance field, (by the positions filled in European quality assurance bodies[69]), the doctoral student notices with realism that Bologna Process "is composed of a number of "lines of action" conceived to increase competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education in Europe", but it "never declared harmonization of national policies as one objective. Ministerial press releases do not have legal value. On the other hand, the Process follows the open coordination method (Ruiter, 2010) and uses the voluntary identification of common objectives and criteria, and instruments to achieve them"[70].

[69] *Ms Prisacariu worked in the Secretariat of EQAR / ENQA*

[70] *See Prisacariu, Ancuta D., Ideological reconstruction of external evaluation of quality in higher education. Critical aspects and pragmatic orientations (Ph.D thesis), University of Bucharest, 2015*

In the same context we must support the idea of responsibility in the construction of European Higher Education Area: “the main responsibility for realization of reforms in higher education lies with member states and education institutions. However, the Bologna Process, EU agenda for modernization of universities (European Commission, 2011a) and the creation of European research area show that the challenges and political answers go beyond the national frontiers. To maximize the contribution of European higher education systems to a smart, sustainable growth favourable to inclusion, reforms are necessary in key fields: increasing the number of higher education graduates at all levels; enhancing the quality and relevance of development of human capital in higher education; creation of effective mechanisms of government and financing to support excellence; and consolidation of knowledge triangle between education, research and employers. In addition, international mobility of students, researchers and staff and increase in internationalization of higher education have a strong impact on quality and affect each of these key fields” (European Commission, 2011a).

The creation of a European professional identity has represented a major objective of processes, policies and practices, as you can see from the chart below.



Identitate europeana – European identity
Procese europene – European processes
Politici europene – European policies
Practici europene – European practices
Practici regionale – regional practices
Practici institutionale – institutional practices
Identitate profesionala europena - European professional identity
Bologna - Bologna

Figure IV. 1 *European professional identity*

The sustained demonstration can show that the sets of processes, policies and

practices, configured in the historical and intensely quoted European Declarations (presented in random order, London, Leuven, Bergen, Berlin, Bucharest or the last of them, Yerevan) and in the other ones which will follow, can represent fundamental landmarks for the evolutions and developments specific to European and global higher education.

In relation to the global perspective oriented to internationalization, defined at European level by the trends which were derived from Bologna Process, the next antithetic couplings are noteworthy with the role of directing the short-term educational policies. They were presented in the analyses dedicated to Academic Career from HDR Project 155/1.2/S/136180 – Internationalization, fairness and university management for a higher education of quality (IEMU), coordinated by UEFISCDI and aims at the following dimensions with guidance role: from elites to massification of education and training, from local/regional approach to global approach, from the use of mainly governmental funds to attraction of private investments, from peer management to corporate management, from national standards to "cross-national" landmarks, from regional space to international mobilities, from national cultural frames to cultural diversity of students, from accreditation mechanisms to QA "improvement" mechanisms – confidence, transparency, impact. So that from the perspective of comprehensive contribution of higher education system to the overcome of economic crisis it is recommended to shift emphasis from "knowledge economy" to "knowledge society", an objective which the contemporary sociologists appreciate with responsibility as the future stage of social/societal evolution.

In view of dynamic illustration of interconnections established at the level of major processes and policies promoted at European level in the field of higher education after the appearance of Bologna Process and with the purpose of creating EHEA, we made an illustrative comprehensive chart. The general image of European processes which define the European Higher Education Area EHEA can be presented in synthetic manner as follows:

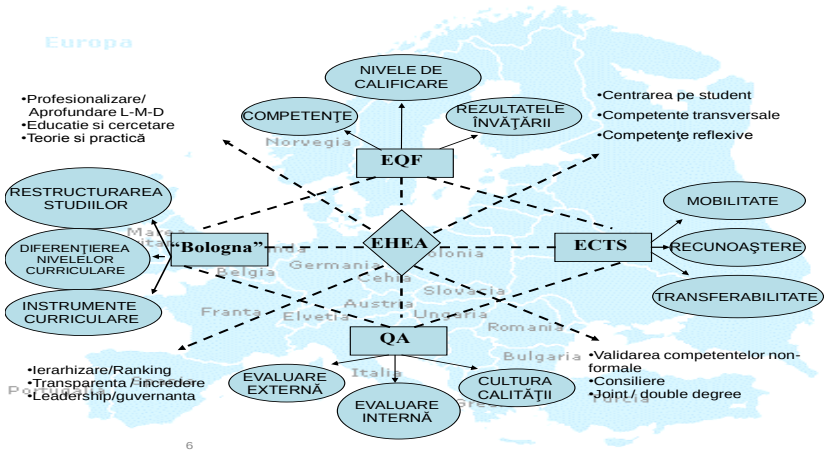


Figure IV. 2

Source: Iucu, 2009[71]*.*

EQF –EQF
Nivele de calificare - Qualification levels
Rezultatele invatarii - Learning results
Centrarea pe student –Focus on student
Competente transversale-Transversal skills
Competente reflexive –Reflexive skills
EHEA - EHEA
Validarea competentelor non-formale – Assessment of non-formal skills
Consiliere – Counselling
Joint/ double degree- Joint/ double degree
Ierarhizare/ Ranking – Prioritization / Ranking
Transparenta / Incredere- Transparency / Confidence
Leadership / guvernanta –Leadership / Governance
Profesionalizare / Aprofundare L-M-D – Professionalization / Deepening L-M-D
L-M-D (Licenta – Master – Doctorat) – B – M – D (Bachelor – Master – Doctorate)
Educatie si cercetare- Education and research
Teorie si practica- Theory and practice
ECTS - ECTS
Mobilitate – Mobility
Recunoastere – Recognition
Transferabilitate –Transferability
Bologna - Bologna
Restructurarea studiilor – Restructuring of studies
Diferentierea nivelelor curriculare – Differentiation of curricular levels
Instrumente curriculare – Curricular instruments
QA - QA
Evaluare externa – External evaluation
Evaluare interna – Internal evaluation
Cultura calitatii – Quality Culture

The higher education institutions do not remain indifferent to the challenges regarding the tasks which will be associated to them in view of their involvement in the European processes of construction and development on the future policies axis of EHEA. The strategic institutional dimensions regarding the construction of European Higher Education Area can be concentrated as follows: compatibility of educational programmes with national and European academic programmes, European

[71]*Ten years after Bologna: towards a European Teacher Education Area, in The first ten years after Bologna, Editors Otmar Gassner, Lucien Kerger, Michael Schratz, ENTEP, 2009, p.55*

compatibility of university diplomas and certificates, common European programmes; European master's degree, European doctor's degree, compatibilization of university qualifications based on EQF (European Qualifications Framework), exploitation of advantages of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), quality assurance of academic services of higher education institutions, promotion of student-centered education, stimulation of mobility in European educational area, stimulation of placement of graduates on European labour market, exploitation in institutional sense of internal and international competitiveness.

In the same European image, another main actor representative of European will of higher education institutions, EUA – European University Association, established a series of European priorities for institutional modernization of universities in the EHEA context: supporting the mission of diversification and increase of institutional autonomy, promotion of an adequate support and financing system of higher education institutions, LLL – Lifelong learning promoted as institutional policy of increasing employability, assurance of quality and transparency, development and support for European academic mobility, professional recognition and mobility at cycle level and between cycles, building bridges between EHEA and ERA (European Research Area) by consolidation of institutions which offer Ph.D. studies of quality, mobility in research area by exploitation of post-doctoral studies, development of a global commitment for promotion of European higher education in Asian, African, Latino-American areas.. We can see at this level of analysis a careful approach of quality assurance system beyond the formal frames, product of top-down decisions and less a result of reflexive exercises on good practices, institutional, national or European practices (EUA, 2014).

4.1.2 Priorities for the future of European higher education in the context EHEA – from Bucharest to ... Yerevan

Given that “Bologna Process consists of biannual conferences and is a transnational platform in which the ministers in charge with higher education discuss the progress and future priorities and between biannual conferences, national delegations and groups of stakeholders meet in “*follow-up groups*" to develop strategies for realization of Bologna Process objectives ” (Prisacariu, 2015), the metaphor used in this subtitle targets the period and open space of public discussions between the two events which marked Bologna Process in concrete actions and high level reunions, the Meeting of Bucharest/ Declaration of Bucharest (2012) and the Meeting of Yerevan (2015). Thus, the European systemic priorities outlined after the works of Ministerial Conference EHEA of 26-27 April 2012 from Bucharest and filtered by EUA experts were:

- Strengthening the partnership between the governmental authorities and stakeholders;
- Focus of governmental support for financing EHEA;

- Promotion of higher education institutions "engaged" from economic, social, regional and community point of view;
- Consolidation of Bologna model stakeholders in the revision of ESG (European Standards and Guidelines) of EHEA;
- Increasing the synergies between EHEA and ERA (European Research Area);
- Building an identity of European higher education in the world;
- Promotion and increasing the added value of European mobilities for European socio-educational dynamics.

As you can see, there are strong emphases in the area of quality assurance, transparency, and European identity, ideas which in a refined form will be found in the documents and resolutions of Conference of Yerevan where in May 2015, the ministers of education from European countries identified four key priorities for the future of EHEA:

- The first one is the strengthening / consolidation of quality and relevance of teaching and learning activities with all the meanings previously adopted;
- The second priority was the employability of graduates on the longitudinal route of their professional life;
- The third important dimension was the transformation of higher education systems into more inclusive and transparent systems;
- The fourth dimension was the design and implementation of brave structural reforms which assure high chances of success at social and individual/ personal level.

The continuities and discontinuities identified even in the conception of objectives designed and anticipated for the evolutions of higher education systems are of nature to position the procedural, active, identifiable and measurable aspect of future developments. In this context QA appears both in its classical, explicit forms, but also in implicit sense, by the quality of educational processes involved as relationship and interaction in higher education institutions.

4.1.3 EHEA and quality challenges: quality as product ... "brand", quality as process ... "education", quality as "cultural institutional state" …"identity"

The perspectives of quality assurance processes can be regarded so as to justify the mission of specific actions: relationship between hierarchy rankings, transparency–facilitation processes, increasing the public trust in educational services provided by higher education institutions, calibration of strategies and specific instruments compared to the QA mission (e.g. analysis of universities' missions), development of quality culture in universities – from slogan to good institutional practices.

By extracting from them we can present in detail the three dimensions with essay value and we appreciated that the title should contain them: quality as product – "brand", quality as process – "education", quality as cultural institutional state – "identity".

4.1.3.1 Quality as product – brand...

In the Report on the progress recorded in quality assurance of higher education (European Commission, 2009), we are presented with the main evolutions at European level which the quality assurance processes could have:

1. Strong increase of European quality assurance infrastructure – increasing the number of quality agencies led to a strong development of quality assurance networks.

2. Quality assurance presents a limited European dimension – that is why the European Commission encourages the Member States to give the higher education institutions the opportunity to ask to be accredited (or to obtain other quality labels) from agencies included in the register from outside of their own country. "*This can turn into reality only if several conditions are simultaneously fulfilled:*

- The higher education institutions need sufficient autonomy to request a quality label from abroad;
- The agencies must have the capacity, must be allowed and be willing to operate outside their own national borders;
- The national governments and quality assurance agencies must confirm the agencies registered from other countries and recognize their conclusions" (European Commission, 2009, COM (2009/2010) 487 final, Brussels, 21.9.2009 / 22.09.2010), Report on progress recorded in quality assurance of higher education).

"However, in general, the cross-border quality assurance is limited. Therefore, there is little comparable information for the interested parties, especially students, to make selections in full knowledge of the cause in connection with the place and object of studies".

3. International trends: enhanced commitment for transparency.

In different regions of the world several new quality assurance networks emerged – sometimes using Europe as reference model. Dialogue at world level regarding quality assurance has intensified in the *International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education* (INQAAHE)".

Another important evolution both at European and global level represents the large number of international classifications for universities. "They are often the object of criticism in higher education community for their methodological defects and unidimensional approach (respectively the focus on results of research in "concrete sciences" and neglecting the performance of universities in fields such as humanities and social sciences, teaching and influence on the community). Without neglecting

these deficiencies, the classifications can be a useful instrument of comparison and contrast between the higher education institutions and their programmes"[72].

4.1.3.2 Quality as process – education …

A report of European Commission[73] identifies that "*many higher education institutions place too little emphasis on the quality of teaching and more emphasis on research, while the educational agenda of European Union, Europe 2020, focuses on the promotion of economic growth and integration of university graduates on the labour market, but many times, the qualification of students does not correspond to the demand on the market*"[74].

The mentioned report, made by the Group of top level experts for modernization of higher education, shows "the way in which reforms can be made at European level for improvement of quality of teaching-learning process so that the curriculum corresponds to the needs of students, employers and the careers of the future and increasing the number of graduates".

The document with programmatic value "Rethinking education" (European Commission, 2012) points out that the quality of teaching process represents an essential issue in higher education too... If the efforts are maintained, the European Union could fulfil its main objective of 40% diplomas of tertiary level. "Both research and teaching should be supported by solid professional development programmes. However, the teaching process is the first to influence the results of students, increases the chances of graduates to find a job and promotes the image of European higher education institutions all over the world. Now only a few countries have strategies for promotion of quality in the teaching process in higher education, including the training of teaching staff regarding pedagogic competences".[75]

In the Press Conference from the launch of the Report, the President of Working Group, Mary McAleese showed: "The teaching staff from higher education must benefit from professional training and assistance they need to fulfil their role in excellent conditions. Our report shows the way in which this objective can be achieved", while the Commissioner for Education at that time, Androulla Vassiliou pointed out that it is necessary "to teach the teachers how to teach" recognizing that "This situation must be rebalanced. The role of teaching in definition of academic merit needs a stronger emphasis and recognition, especially in terms of career. I totally agree to the proposal that all teaching staff in higher education must be taught how to teach".

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[72] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), 2014, Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity in the European Higher Education Area (RIQAA)

[73] High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, Report to the European Commission on Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe'shigher education institutions, June 2013)

[74] High Level Group on theModernisation of HigherEducation, Report to the European Commission on Improvingthe quality of teaching and learning in Europe's higher education institutions, June 2013

[75] European Commission, 2012, Communication from the commission to the european parliament, thecouncil, the european economic and social committee and the committee of the regions Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes.)

In the spirit of this Report, the following trends and future lines of action formulated as expectations of Commission in this respect are noteworthy:

- The European Union wants a closer cooperation between universities, companies and research centres. The Agenda is part of wider strategy of European Commission, Europe 2020 Strategy, and was designed by EUA and developed by the Institutional Evaluation Project of "*promotion of economic growth and occupation of workforce in which education plays an essential role (...) The public authorities responsible for higher education should assure the existence of a sustainable well-funded framework which supports the efforts of higher education institutions regarding the improvement of quality of teaching and learning. Moreover, each institution should elaborate and implement a strategy for supporting and continuous improvement of quality of teaching and learning, by allotting the necessary level of human and financial resources for that task and integrating this priority in the general mission, paying the same importance to teaching and research*." [76]
- Higher education institutions should encourage, appreciate and take into account the feedback of students, which could detect on time problems with teaching and learning and could lead to faster and more efficient improvements. In this respect the needs analyses and student opinion barometers indicated the following educational competences specific to teaching staff: student-orientation of teaching and learning activities, their focus on the development level of students, use of active-participative strategies, application of management of academic group, diversification of evaluation techniques with orientation to the performance of student and competences formed etc. Even from the perspective of students[77], the improvement of professional development system of university teaching staff must be done with orientation to quality-educational performance axis[78]. On the same subject, participation of students, in the Report on the progress recorded in quality assurance of higher education (European Commission, 2009) it is highlighted that the "participation of students in quality assurance as basic norm in European higher education Area gained field in the last years, although this involvement often remains restricted to certain aspects or procedures. The involvement of representatives of enterprises and non-resident persons significantly varies from internal quality assurance to external quality assurance and is in general, stronger in evaluation committees of agencies than in decision-making bodies"[79].
- The curricula should be elaborated and monitored by dialogue and partnerships between the teaching staff, students, graduates and actors on workforce market, being based on new teaching and learning methods, for the students to be able to acquire relevant competences which increase their chances of getting hired.

[76] *European University Association (EUA), 2010, Examining Quality Culture: Part I – Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions, by Loukkola, T., and Zhang, T. (Brussels, EUA)*
[77] *The Report of European Student Union (ESU), 2013, Quest for Quality for Students: Survey on Student's Perspectives (Brussels, ESU).*
[78] *Idem.*
[79] *See also the earlier mentioned document – European Commission, 2009.*

- The performance of students should be evaluated depending on clear learning objectives previously agreed and elaborated in collaboration with all the faculty members who participated in their realization. The higher education institutions and the national policy-makers should provide counselling, guidance, tutorship and follow-up systems in collaboration with students in order to support the youth from their admission in higher education until graduation and afterwards.
- The higher education institutions should introduce and promote cross-sectional, cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches of teaching, learning and evaluation which help the students deepen their knowledge and develop entrepreneurial and innovative spirit.

The report also recommends that higher education institutions elaborate and implement general internationalization strategies as part of their mission and the exercise of their functions, promoting a larger mobility both on horizontal and vertical axis (European Commission, 2009).

4.1.3.3 Quality as "cultural state" - identity ...

In relation to definitions given by European Commission[80], high quality and relevance of university education can provide knowledge, skills and cross-sectional competences of student, which could guarantee their success after graduation, by using a best-performing learning environment valuing and supporting quality teaching. The quality assurance processes allow the public to have greater confidence in the education system, which is recognized for transparency and opening on a public position.

In the Report on progress recorded in quality assurance of higher education (European Commission, 2009) it is shown that: "quality assurance of higher education is in the centre of efforts to build a coherent, compatible and attractive European Higher Education Area, in accordance with the objectives of Pan-European Bologna Process. Over the last decade, in Europe and in the whole world the interest in quality assurance of higher education increased. In conditions of globalization, economic integration and increased academic and professional mobility, it is a greater need for recognition of qualifications outside the country which awards them". With a special pragmatism it is then pointed out in the document mentioned, feeling a reverberation closer to the national higher education area: "the provision of higher education "without frontiers" determines an increase of importance of cross-border quality assurance. The appearance of the so-called "factories of diplomas" (false universities which sell false "diplomas" on internet) gives a vital importance to the distinction between the legitimate education obtained abroad and unjustified qualifications. Quality assurance contributes to transparency and credibility of higher education for European citizens and employers and for students and university teaching staff from other continents".

The European recommendations in the field affirm that the "main responsibility for the quality of higher education belongs to higher education institutions. The internal

[80] *See also Quality and Relevance in Higher Education – What is it?, Brussels, 2015.*

quality assurance systems from higher education institutions have as objective the monitoring and improvement of quality and development of a real "quality culture". Yet, they often lack the independence and public accessibility necessary for the information of stakeholders in a transparent and verifiable way. The assurance of such information represents the role of external quality assurance, which represents the main driver of recommendation and is accomplished by independent quality assurance agencies" (European Commission, 2009).

According to the same document invoked, external quality assurance can consist of: evaluation ("auditing") of quality of a certain higher education institution, its programmes or units; comparison of quality for different higher education institutions in a given field or in a given subject ("comparative analysis"); guaranteeing the fulfilment of certain predefined quality "standards" ("accreditation"); awarding of different quality labels which usually denote high quality or "excellence".

Yet the experts in the field, authors and contributors to the realization of the report mentioned above also report the diversified landscape of quality assurance on European territory by the appearance of "new quality assurance agencies and networks which represent the most important evolution in European landscape. "Nowadays there are quality assurance agencies in almost all the countries of European Higher Education Area although they are quite heterogeneous regarding the size, field of activity, status, orientation and international capacity. Many of them are small, newly created, with experience and limited European/international exposure. With few exceptions, their mission is limited to their own country (and sometimes to their own region): only very few of them are active outside their own territory. Most of the agencies focus on the evaluation of programmes, but many are involved in accreditations or institutional audits"[81].

The European reports invoked emphasize that the main challenge for most countries is to conceive evaluation procedures which measure the results of learning process. The reference document of this subchapter, with relevance for the analysis conducted, the Report on progress recorded in quality assurance of higher education (European Commission, 2009), uses three indices for measurement of progress in quality assurance:

- The development stage of external quality assurance: the countries receive a better score if they have an external system which applies to all the institutions and operates in accordance with European quality assurance standards and guidelines.
- Participation level of students: the countries receive a better score if the students participate in the management of national quality assurance bodies, in external evaluations of higher education institutions and/or in programmes, in internal quality assurance processes and in preparation of self-evaluation reports.
- Level of international participation: the countries receive a better score if there is an international participation in external evaluations of institutions and/or

[81] *European University Association (EUA), 2010, Examining Quality Culture: Part I – Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions, by Loukkola, T., and Zhang, T. Brussels, EUA.*

programmes, in the management of national quality assurance bodies and in external evaluations of national quality assurance agencies.

But in quantitative sense, the conclusions also report that "awareness raising regarding quality standards varies between countries and districts, but a substantial experience has been gained in their application: thousands of persons (university staff, experts, students, representatives of companies and society) participated in the self-evaluation procedures, participated in evaluation committees or were interviewed in evaluation visits". However, it is noteworthy that, "even if "European Standards and guidelines" were elaborated in the context of Bologna process, they do not refer to the importance of observing the basic norms of European Higher Education Area (for example, those concerning the qualifications framework or the use of European Credit Transfer System) and the main priorities (for example, capacity to get a job and mobility)" (European Commission, 2009).

The main directions of action in structuring and developing quality assurance processes of higher education in Europe, resulted from the organization of vast consultations with: managers, professors, researchers and students from university, with companies and social partners, with governments and international bodies, should be regarded in the light of the following trends which the experts in the field identified in the quoted Report (European Union, 2009) as follows: "A new quality assurance infrastructure, a re-evaluation of European standards and guidelines, a stronger European dimension in quality assurance". All these lines of action which are traced in the document mentioned found across time also other analytical expressions in the Parliament and Council Recommendations, 2006, an older document, but equally important for structuring the European projections regarding the future of quality assurance processes.[82]

A new quality assurance infrastructure

- ✓ *Quality assurance agencies still represent a relatively new feature of European Higher Education Area.*
- ✓ *They will have to prove their independence and professionalism to consolidate the confidence of stakeholders.*
- ✓ *The Agencies will have to persuade their European counterparts that they offer a sufficient comparability level, important as prerequisite for the mutual recognition of diplomas and promotion of students' mobility.*
- ✓ *There is the risk that agencies became too many while their size remains quite reduced (appearance of junctions between agencies can be considered by quality assurance networks which exist at European level)*
- ✓ *The Agencies could also take into account the extension of the scope of their own activities, to find approaches that are more adequate to lifelong learning, distance higher education, online education, professional training, transnational and private higher education.*

[82] *See also European Parliament and Council, 2006, Recommendation of the European Parliamentand of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education(2006/143/EC), (Strasbourg, Official Journal of the European Union*

- ✓ *Realization of a clear distinction of roles between ENQA, EQAR and the European Consortium for accreditation (ECA), with a more intense concentration on benefits for the users of quality assurance could increase the efficiency of European quality assurance infrastructure.*

A re-evaluation of European standards and guidelines

The European Standards and Guidelines could be developed to increase the coordination of quality assurance with development of European Higher Education Area, which could take into consideration the following three aspects:

- ✓ Observance of the main structure (three cycles) as basic requirement for quality in European Higher Education Area.
- ✓ In European Higher Education Area, the quality standards would include priorities such as the capacity to get a job and mobility
- ✓ The standards of internal quality assurance systems from higher education institutions could be included also in other key dimensions such as quality of services for students in general, career guidance / getting a job for students and graduates, development of financial management capacity and application of European Charter for researchers and Code of conduct for recruitment of researchers.

A stronger European dimension in quality assurance

National Quality Assurance Agencies should be encouraged to develop activities beyond frontiers and to request the recognition of their decisions in other countries, for example, through mutual recognition agreements.

- ✓ The higher education institutions could be encouraged to use the services of agencies registered outside their country by clarification of portability of national accreditation in European Higher Education Area and also the problem of quality assurance for cross border higher education in European Higher Education Area.
- ✓ Given the increased importance of common courses and with double diploma in Europe, clear principles for the avoidance of the need for multiple accreditations could be useful.
- ✓ The Commission supports the development of transparency instruments which supplement quality assurance, especially those which provide a comparative vision of higher education institutions and their programmes.

All these stages must be gone through in view of orientation to a smart, sustainable European higher education system favourable to inclusion in a European area marked by the great identity challenge... European Identity by a higher education of quality.

Another European reference document, this time a recent one, given to publicity a few months ago, the Report titled “The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation“, highlighted very clearly that quality assurance processes continued to be a dynamic area of evolution in the essence of Bologna Process and development of EHEA. As long as the information related to internal

quality assurance processes was relatively poor and limited, the data showed that the trend of higher education institutions of developing their own strategies for QA have spread and are increasing. To an equal extent, "accountability" and institutional transparency both necessary in quality assurance were extended so that almost all European countries reported that higher education institutions publish quality evaluation even when they have some nuances or even negative results recorded[83] . The external quality assurance is already considered a gained asset of Bologna Process and EHEA, as it is shown in the Report, so that the question that arises is not related to structures and their construction, but especially whether they cause visible effects and work in agreement with *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). Here some progress is still expected, particularly related to the participation of students in QA processes, being necessary a profound involvement for the real reformation of higher education by new procedures and flexible and inclusive QA standards.

It is clear from the perspective of institutional functionality, especially when we speak of quality assurance agencies, that we are dealing with two active philosophies: focus on institutional accreditation procedures or at programme level or focus on the evaluation of quality of educational processes and in some cases, even attempts at evaluation from the perspective of performance in research. From the point of view of evaluation areas targeted, the emphasis gradually shifts to dimensions such as internationalization, best-performing management and services for students, entrepreneurship from the perspective of relationship with workforce market. One of the most important gains felt at the level of quality evaluations was the opportunity of opening the evaluation procedures to an agency from outside the country based on the conformity with ESG. Although the tendency is still very frail, we can speak of a possible evolution to an internationalization of quality evaluation. Even if in the Communiqué of Bucharest the need for a legislative renewal at national level is affirmed for internationalization of quality evaluation, few European countries reported such progress[84].

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In the context of continuous globalization of higher education and university research, the author Andree Sursock showed in her work "Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities", by Andree Sursock, European University Association, 2015, that the importance associated with internationalization will contribute to the strengthening of EHEA and to the strategic consolidation of its status and

[83] *European Commission, 2015 & OECD, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015, Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen*

[84] *See also European Commission, 2015, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015. The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.*

international visibility. The results recorded in Trends 2015 suggest that in comparison with the previous years, the educational policies promoted at national level were important in determination of efficient and impactful actions, as long as the concrete and sustainable European policies were more difficult to promote and validate than in the previous decade. Similarly to the opinion of Mrs Andree Sursock, in our opinion, the future policies promoted in this distinctive field of analysis will be the product of national or why not, regional spheres of decision-making influence and less the result of negotiations at the level of "DG Education and Culture" from European Commission. The maturity of national educational systems will confirm the validity of policy processes which will mark the decade 2015-2020 and in the field of quality assurance.

4.2 Institutional development of universities of Romania. Strategic factors from quality assurance perspective

For over 25 years from the fall of Communist regime, the Universities of Romania have had to face major challenges which exceed the operational and tactical levels and target strategic choices. They have to find answers, on one hand, which relate to placement on a very dynamic, flexible and fluid international market and on the other hand, to change substantially the internal functioning methods which correspond less to the current international context.

4.2.1 Strategic Context

A key question refers to the capacities of Romanian universities to answer the strategic challenges they have to deal with. These challenges are directly connected with the evolution of changes after 1989 and the strategic context in which they carry out their activity.

First of all, the strategic framework is defined by the European integration of Romania. Strategic programmatic documents such as Europe 2020 (which includes universities in the wider perspective of development of a knowledge-based economy) or documents which define the efforts of developing the European higher education area are analysed in the Barometer in quality-relevant areas.

Understanding the evolution of universities outside the evolution of society represents an error that must be avoided. The strategic advantages and disadvantages of higher education institutions are directly related to this context analysis. So far Romania has gone through at least five different stages of administrative reform (Hintea, 2011, p. 180):

- ✓ Law reforms (continuing);
- ✓ Reforms at the level of formal structures and procedures (intermittent);
- ✓ Public policy reforms (continuing, including regarding education);
- ✓ Structural reforms (rare, stimulated mainly by the economic crisis);

- ✓ Management reforms (intermittent, in incipient stage, focused mainly on changes in the quality of services and performance).

Another target more or less acknowledged, but present in all the universities of Central and East-European countries, was the reduction of the distance between them, and the Western universities at all relevant levels: teaching, research, academic management, *outreach*. This difference was so important (for example, *outreach*), that in certain areas they had to build even the field of intervention which did not exist until then. Essentially the whole post-Communist development was subsumed to this East-West reporting with all the advantages (multiplication of functional models) and disadvantages (integration of inherent particularities).

The Universities had to deal with the need of changing the traditional teaching processes and educational experiences of students and professors. The process was initially slow, in the absence of significant pressures, but knew an organic growth because of changes in the profile of relevant stakeholders (professors, students, communities, employers).

Research represented and still represents a major challenge in many universities for the construction of best-performing programmes. The traditional focus only on teaching made the research represent a secondary effort for a long time. That is why, when it suddenly became a major factor in evaluation of performance, the impact was serious at teaching body level. The skills and knowledge necessary for relevant research schools are built in time and the integration of research in definition of university performance is complex.

An interesting feature of post-Communist age was related to international partnerships. For many universities of Romania and Central and Eastern European countries they represented more than simple international exercises – were actually a search of structural models of strategic construction. The impact of these models was extremely important on medium and long term. Jenei, Leloup and van Den Berg (2002, p. 5) hierarchized the cooperations on five levels: exchanges of contacts and information (initial meetings, interaction, expression of common interests), systematic exchanges of knowledge and experience (extended dialogues, visits, exchanges, collaborations in research), *joint action* (initiation of organizational projects of collaboration), mutual cooperation (coordinated activities and programmes), institutional partnerships (permanent self-sustaining programmes and projects). Those universities which manage to get to the institutionalization level of international partnerships have a lot to gain.

The university management needed major changes from what existed in Communist age or immediate post-Communist age, when the traditional methods of academic management were essentially characterized by bureaucracy and lack of flexibility.

Other fields considered as challenges after 1989 were the development of training and lifelong education or initiation of consultancy activities.

A major problem which the universities from Romania and from Central and Eastern European countries had to face and still face is the relationship with the community. The ivory tower model is so powerful in the universities mentalities that the universities sometimes instinctively place themselves above and outside the society's problems. The *community outreach* capacities are limited and their importance is not visible for universities and for public institutions or private organizations. This type of approach brought a series of negative effects for Romanian universities which should be organically connected to national, regional or local community.

4.2.2 Key strategic factors

Beyond the preliminary analysis which allows us to establish the starting point in the configuration of Romanian universities' profile after 1989, our attention is focused on the challenges they have to deal with today. The new university paradigm becomes more and more visible. Many programmes are faced with predictable, but neglected strategic effects. Many professors and managers have to deal with atypical and tough choices, but those choices cannot be avoided. The traditional dilemmas did not disappear, but were doubled by a new type of questions which mark the university environment of Romania and Central and Eastern European countries.
The strategic analysis is dependent on the identification of key strategic factors in the targeted field. They represent factors which will influence on long term and in structural manner the future evolution. We will place the main challenges we face on medium and long term into five main categories: students, market, community, decision-makers, university management and internationalization.

4.2.2.1 Students

One of the main problems is the relation with the new profile of the student. Today's student tends more to be oriented towards academic mobility (the international offer is very attractive and the costs are low in many cases), towards interactions outside of immediate environment and towards multicultural/ international experiences. The growing mobility in Romanian society has significant effects on a specific segment very interested in diversity. As such, today's student is more willing to a comparative attitude/evaluation, which automatically leads to different and high expectations. This is a challenge, but also an opportunity: the stimulation of critical thinking by university programmes has a favourable field and can lead to excellent results for the future graduates capable of influencing the society at different levels.

The universities have to relate with the “web-student”, used to the advantages of online services (from banking services and search of information to communication

with friends or the payment of invoices). A key question is: to what extent are we capable to get closer to their expectations in terms of smart use of new software technologies? A multitude of university programmes still focus their entire promotion and marketing activity on the traditional methods of written press, although their "customers" are clearly interested in online environment. Are the organizational culture of universities and their structure able to meet these justified expectations in a coherent manner?

The way in which we perceive the student has the nature of affecting the relationship with the student on the long term and even the success chances of a university programme. After 1989 a strongly developed trend in universities (because of the explosion of the number of faculties, the number of students, the existence of a permanent demand regardless of the quality of services, the pressures from massive groups only interested in getting a diploma, the direct dependence of financing on the number of students) was the consideration of the student as a financial resource. The number of students, graduation of a higher percentage of students were directly connected with increased financing (by a university financing system built on this logic). Concomitantly (and less perceivable) this led in some programmes to a specific type of expectation: the student has to pay tuition fees, spend less time in the faculty, pass quietly (if necessary – helped) his/her examinations, get the degree and leave to make room for a new generation ready to occupy the empty seats. At first sight it seems to be a logical economic behaviour, which led to serious long-term effects of which we mention only two: lack of long-term attachment of the student for the faculty/university graduated from and a lack of involvement and demotivation of professors who were forced to work with larger depersonalized groups.

If we can perceive the students more than the financing providers and resources, the results are spectacular – a positive and personalized experience in faculties could provide the society not only with well-prepared and best-performing graduates, but also with support to the university on medium and long term.

The demographic scenarios must be taken into consideration: Romania is going through major transformations regarding the number of high school graduates, both because of demographic decrease and as a result of increasing the thoroughness of high school graduation examination. Traditionally, the university has focused mainly on this specific group and less on other age segments. At the same time, the Romanian society has felt more and more the need of perfection, re-specialization of many individuals. This means a redefinition of target groups, capacities and teaching methods, a new type of offer and a new type of marketing. *Lifelong learning* and distance education (related directly to the use of new technologies) are answers which must not be neglected.

4.2.2.2 Market

Currently, one of the most actual discourses in the public environment of Romania refers to the "lack of capacity by universities to meet the expectations of the market". The employers tend to have a negative perception regarding the results of universities, especially the quality of graduates whose knowledge and skills are not considered relevant for the market requirements.

A particular danger for university programmes is represented by self-limitation, wrong delimitation of areas of interest for graduates. The borders between public, private and non-profit sectors in modern societies are different from those that existed 40-50 years ago. They relate to different cultural perceptions, political values and global evolutions and are very fluid: the shifting of services from one side to another is very fast and affects areas traditionally considered impossible to change. On the other hand, the profile of employees in public, private and non-profit sectors tends to be closer especially for certain positions, hence the greater mobility between sectors, especially at management level. It is essential to train graduates who by skills and competences affirm themselves in the relevant fields chosen by them at a given moment, as persons capable of bringing an important contribution to the functioning of organization and community to which they belong.

In the same order of ideas, a serious challenge for universities refers to the capacity of relating with the key players on the market. As an extension of ivory tower doctrine, many times, universities seem to be isolated from the decision-making areas from the society and do not have relevance in the decision-maker's eyes. The incapacity or lack of interest in establishing structural relationships with decision-makers are dangerous and can affect the success of university programmes on long term.

Another strategic choice regarding the placement of university programmes on the market is connected with the definition of area of interest: are we subnational, national, regional or global actors? Depending on the answer to this question we can define the competitive advantage, the partners, performance standards, placement on the market, recruitment, marketing etc.

4.2.2.3 Community

The relationship with the community is essential. The concept of *community outreach* means more than a superficial involvement in marginal activities or just a reaction to the appearance of a stimulus or external pressure. It means a strategic choice of long-term involvement in the local or national community in the expertise areas of university programme. As we mentioned before, the placement of university above and outside the community has long-term effects regarding its capacity to obtain the support of community, to maintain a long-lasting relationship with *alumni* and to use its capacities and expertise in relevant areas which can bring added-value to students, professors and the community.

The type of partnerships which a university programme develops with community is defining for its activity. Either we are speaking of purely technical partnerships or combinations which bring a volunteering component or activism, they are extremely important both for the training of students and for the competitive profile of the programme.

4.2.2.4 Relationship with decision-makers

As we mentioned above, the relationship with decision-making areas is essential for university programmes which have the duty to be present in the difficult effort of restructuring a complex and deficiently built post-Communist system. The problem of relationship with practitioners and decision-makers is not an exclusive area of Central and Eastern European countries, but features certain specificities.

The main question for universities is: what do we offer those who want to change the way in which the society works at local and central level? Do we have something really relevant to say? Do we really care what happens around us? Do we associate ourselves directly and openly with the change and reform processes?
Ideally, our programmes should be major suppliers of restructuring models. In reality, our presence on this market is modest. Even where there is involvement, most of the times it is about individual, not institutional initiatives. The decision-makers are mostly interested in ideas and models which help them modernize the organizations, results, products and management systems. The empirical research capable of helping the political or administrative decision-makers to make important decisions is absent. The attitude of universities is defensive and the studies, where they exist, are kept almost exclusively in the sphere of academic discussions. Because of this type of behaviour the consultancy market in Romania contains a limited segment influenced by universities (despite the high expertise level). What should strategically preoccupy the university programmes is the need of having impact in community and making a difference regarding the supply of expertise for the interested areas of society.

4.2.2.5 Academic Management

University management in Romania is dealing with a multitude of pressing challenges which seem more noticeable at financial flows level. The main financial sources remain the traditional ones: public money (financing from the state budget) and the tuition fees of students. The third major source of best-performing universities (*private endowments*) is almost non-existent at the moment. The big advantage of these funds is that they offer the universities a stable financial source which allows them to get out of vicious cycle for getting money from tuition fees (as many students as possible) and allow a totally different qualitative structuring of educational and research process. Why is this source unknown in Romania and in Central and

Eastern European countries? On one hand, it is about limitations in the university management *know-how*; on the other hand, it is about the lack of donation tradition. Here we can see secondary effects of separation of university from the community and the "mechanical" relationship with students.

The Romanian university management must try to find at strategic level alternative approaches to the typical financial solutions in moments of massive budgetary cuts. For the success of these programmes it is essential the managerial capacity to assure financial sustainability beyond the national educational policies (more or less stimulative). The institutional capacity is directly dependent on financial performance and traditional solutions have started to show their limits.

Another managerial problem refers to the organizational challenges. The key question is how much do we apply inside universities what we are asking others? Are the university programmes management models for society – *learning organizations*, proactive communities, promoters of quality management?

The evaluation of performance occupies an important place in the quality of university management systems. How do we evaluate our performance? What type of standards do we use: national or international? The standards established by national quality agencies? Do we involve in evaluation international quality assurance bodies? Performance is relevant on three major dimensions:

1. Leadership, strategy and institutional framework – contains the strategic side regarding quality assurance process, involvement of management in quality management and the existing institutional structure. This dimension follows the extent to which quality and performance are formally undertaken by the leadership of the programme.

2. Procedures and quality assurance mechanisms – aim at totality of processes which are carried out in institution, designed to assure and increase the quality level of programmes. This dimension has the purpose to identify all the formal mechanisms that exist at study programme level which have as role the maintenance of high quality standards.

3. Results – this dimension has the purpose of evaluating the way in which the quality management system includes result indicators of educational process. It also follows the way in which the information produced by evaluations (*Learning outcomes* – result indicators of learning process) is used.

4.2.2.6 Internationalization

The new global market of university education brings elements related to international competition which exerts change pressures on the programmes in Romania. On the other hand, the same globalization allows strategic choices based on cooperation

which can increase the competitive profile: *joint degrees* which influence the attractiveness of dual programme, common educational programmes offered with international partners, high level comparative research etc. Here it is important the capacity of the programme to integrate the new technologies in the effort of modernization of teaching and research processes.

As such, internationalization directly represents a key strategic factor for universities. The condition for success in this field is an integration of internationalization: international relations have to become from an auxiliary activity an essential activity which can provide universities with a structural advantage on international market. This approach represents a passage to strategic objectives specific to internationalization.

Either we like it or not, the "classical" approaches do not work so well regarding the performance of modern universities. Quality is not a limited technical problem which can be solved by procedures and checking lists. It is more related to a specific type of organizational culture. The European context focused on key elements such as competences, inclusive education, innovation, support for teaching staff, transparency, recognition of competences, sustainable investments provides the framework for this type of culture. Europe 2020 Strategy directly connects the quality of universities with the development of knowledge-based economy and the evolution of building the European higher education area has clear consequences on quality assurance educational policies. Our capacity to identify and take into consideration key strategic factors is essential for strategic success. From this point of view the Quality Barometer 2015 provides a coherent instrument of analysis and strategic projection for the university education in Romania.

4.3 Empirical analysis of quality assurance processes in Romanian higher education

4.3.1 Quality assurance systems

Quality assurance is an important component of Bologna Process, being one of the major achievements of the process. The implementation of mutual recognition of credits, the system of European mobilities could not have been achieved without the consolidation of credibility and public confidence of higher education institutions. The comparable quality assurance systems built on the *European Standards and Guidelines* definitely had an important contribution to their realization. Although in one form or another, the quality assurance processes were present before Bologna Process, a substantial increase of this type of activities was recorded with the adoption of Berlin Communiqué in 2003 and later with the adoption of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in 2005.

However, while external quality assurance is to a large extent aligned to ESG provisions, a significant diversity of approaches persists at European level (Gover, Loukkola, & Sursock, 2015). Differentiations are made according to:

- ***Object of evaluation***, with emphasis on institutions or programmes;
- ***Objectives of evaluation****:* accreditation, quality improvement, respectively comparison and establishment of classes or hierarchies. In the first case, the evaluation is made on the basis of minimal standards in order to take a decision about the acceptance/recognition of public functioning of an institution or programme. The improvement implies the comparison of values with own references of the university/programme for the highlighting of its progress and pace, identification of weaknesses and determination of a plan of adequate measures for each institution/programme. The comparisons based on reference standards (*benchmarks*) imply the establishment of reference values according to the performance of other comparable institutions. They are meant to generate comparable data for classification/ranking of institutions or study programmes.
- ***Type of evaluation***: validation by external evaluation of reported data as a result of internal *assessment* or institutional audit – certification of adequacy of internal quality assurance system, congruence between the quality assurance activities, objectives undertaken and management plan, effectiveness of quality assurance by information generated and measures carried out based on this information. Internal audit is trying to answer the question "are the internal processes efficient?", are the strategic and management decisions based on valid empirical evidence generated systematically by the quality assurance mechanisms? Unlike the validation of evaluation and accreditation, audit does not aim at evaluation of entry data (resources), the teaching/learning activities or the learning results, but is focused on internal processes by which higher education institutions assure and improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- ***Evaluating authority***: evaluation made based on self-professional regulations, respectively direct regulations of the state for quality assurance of higher education or based on the market and commercial regulations. To assure the standardization and generalization of evaluations in public interest, including the professional self-regulations or the types of information publicly available, they are imposed by the state, formally recognized or financially supported by the state (Dill, 2010).

Without neglecting the diversity of approaches and specific options, there is a series of convergent processes at European level regarding quality assurance. Thus, in the last decade we can see a constant increase of quality assurance processes at institutional level (by contrast with processes focused on programme) (Gover, Loukkola, Sursock, 2015), but also greater importance is paid to internal quality

assurance mechanisms, which gives more responsibility to higher education institutions in quality assurance. A comparative study on quality assurance systems ordered by the European Parliament identifies a few important trends beyond the national diversity of procedures and regulations. Thus, it mentions that the development of quality assurance can be described as a curve which evolves from a stronger control in the first stages of its development, to a lower control and more confidence in the internal quality assurance systems, as the system grows up (Wächter et al., 2015). The evaluations at institutional level are rather the type of audit of internal quality assurance practices, institutional strategies and their adequacy to the purposes and missions undertaken (*fitness for/ of purpose*). They consisted less of evaluation of institutional performances, but rather of auditing of internal quality management systems. In addition, the elaboration and adoption of a new version of ESG on the occasion of Meeting of Yerevan (2015) emphasizes the importance of common standards for internal quality assurance. The external evaluation missions should therefore focus less on accreditation and evaluation of teaching and learning and should focus more on the audit of internal quality assurance systems, their functionality from the perspective of mission and purposes undertaken at institutional and programme level and the institutional capacity to generate information used in strategic decisions (Standards 1.7 and 1.8). It is already undertaken that the new registrations (and renewals) of quality assurance agencies in the European Register (EQAR) should aim at adoption and reflection in own evaluation methodologies of the new internal quality assurance standards. In the time horizon until 2020 all the agencies will have to be confirmed in EQAR based on the new ESG.

In the latest report on implementation of Bologna Process drawn up by the European Commission /EACEA/Eurydice (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015) are synthesized the main problems which are generally faced by the European quality assurance systems and which require efforts of improvement. First of all, it requires the improvement of the real participation of students in quality assurance processes. It is one of the issues in which it is difficult to identify a real progress over the last few years; on the contrary, there is suspicion of a more restrained participation of students. A research of European Student Union (ESU, 2013) shows that 60% of students have limited knowledge or do not know any information about the institutional quality assurance processes. The Commission's Report also shows that the European dimension of quality assurance is still limited, only in eight countries (including Romania) the institutions can require to be evaluated by an agency from another Member State, if it is listed in EQAR; in another 12 states there are such possibilities in certain cases and in 23 states the institutions and/or programmes cannot be evaluated by agencies from outside the national borders. Even where it is possible (such as Romania), the frequency of this kind of evaluations is still very low.

4.3.2 From accreditation to internal quality assurance

The European higher education systems have gone across their history through successive stages of expansion as the social needs diversified and specialized. If in Middle Ages (Ruegg, 2004) universities had a relatively lower degree of institutionalization, and their mission can be limited to preservation of knowledge

inherited from Antiquity Age, since the appearance of modernity the university sector has known an unprecedented development. On one hand, the appearance of modern states which are based on bureaucratic organization, on the other hand the accelerated industry development concomitantly determined the development and diversification of higher education sector.

The recent expansion of universities which corresponds to contemporary period is not surprising. To refer strictly to quality assurance, the term defines today dedicated activities in university which we could encounter over 200 years ago. For example, the peer evaluation method exists and has been practiced at different levels in European universities (and not only) for a very long time. What changes in contemporaneity is the institutional level of this type of university practices.

In Romania, the history of quality assurance institution is relatively short, or in other words, the quality assurance is a new practice with a relatively low degree of institutionalization.

In the period before 1989 quality evaluation did not exist at institutional level (Tomusk, 2004, pp. 19-33), the simple motivation for this state of fact was that it was not necessary. The universities were deprived of any form of autonomy regarding the institutional processes they carried out (except for short periods during 1950 – 1989 (Murgescu, 2010, p. 387), there was no need for practices which certified or consolidated the public confidence in universities. With the change of political system, the university education became a service with a very high demand, mainly because of extremely difficult access in the previous period; according to World Bank data, about 8% of Romanian citizens aged between 19 and 23 years old were enrolled in a faculty in 1989 (see also Florian, 2014).

The fast and sudden expansion of Romanian university system in 1990s led to the appearance of the need for regulation and control by the state of the organizations which carry out such activities and issue study diplomas. Thus, in 1993 the first accreditation law in higher education appeared (for a deeper analysis of evolution of quality in higher education in Romania, see Paunescu et al., 2011, pp. 24-54). It must be mentioned that quality assurance appeared and developed in Romania concomitantly with the European evolution of similar policies and organizations. The appearance of ARACIS in 2005, the first (and only) methodology for quality assurance in higher education and the implementation of classification of universities and hierarchization of study programmes since 2011, correspond at European level with the main trends and events which marked the European evolution of quality assurance.

However, the expansionist wave caused by the opening of access to higher education and increase of social demand for educational services and scientific research of universities seem to have slown down. The statistic data presented every year in *Report on status of education* (later renamed *Report on the status of higher education)*, published every year by the Education Sciences Institute,[85] shows that after 2009, the number of students enrolled in the universities of Romania is going

[85] *Publicly available on the website ISE at www.ise.ro*

through a period of decrease. It is interesting that the expansionist wave continues inside universities, the number of employees and specializations or faculties has increased over the last years[86]. (*Figure II.13 and Figure II.21)*

The history of the short but tumultuous life of accreditation and quality assurance must be looked at in the context of the last 20 years when the higher education system passed from a "state-controlled" system to an organizational system "supervised by the state" and which seemed to go towards "market system". If accreditation targeted first the study programmes, quality assurance extended the accreditation procedures to the university as a whole. The object which is evaluated in the functional quality assurance system in Romania is on one hand the study programme and on the other hand, the university as a whole. The issuing body of diploma which certifies the graduation of an educational cycle is the Ministry of Education and the organization which mediates the issue of this diploma is the university, not the department or the faculty which manages the accredited study programme. Moreover, a university is considered accredited if it has at least one accredited study programme, but it cannot issue diplomas for non-accredited study programmes, although it has the legal right to issue diplomas in the field in which it has an accredited study programme. This confused description presents briefly the still unclear situation of quality assurance institution, as it was normed 10 years ago, in 2005. The conceptual clarification can clarify this situation and can be a basis for understanding and identifying solutions which redefine the quality assurance system as it is understood nowadays.

Accreditation is an institution specific to higher education which across time had as main objective the regulation of issue of diplomas on the territory of a state. Accreditation can be considered a sort of legal agreement by which the state, which holds monopoly on diplomas issued on its territory (it recognizes them as valid acts at the hiring of a person), transfers this competence to the universities. This definition of accreditation can be found since the half of 18th century when the new bureaucratic organization of nation states led to the increase of demand for trained and educated staff for filling a position in public administration (Ruegg, 2004; Miroiu and Florian, 2015). Accreditation continued to function as an institution long time after the reform of bureaucracies took place. It continued to function because it represented an extremely efficient mechanism for the regulation of access on the educational services market, but also because it conferred universities a greater reputation and higher organizational prestige and more importantly in European context, it is easier to transfer outside national borders. Through bilateral agreements between states, for recognition of certain diplomas, the universities could relatively easily export the knowledge they held.

Accreditation has become less relevant in the context in which alternative forms of transmission of information have developed as scientific research and education activities are becoming more and more competitive, strongly interconnected and "more" global. The main problem of accreditation is intrinsic, constitutive: it is too

[86] *For official data in this respect, see online data base of INS, Tempo-online, and the Report on the conditions of financing the higher education and measures required, CNFIS, 2015.*

rigid, implies an evaluation system based only on dichotomic decisions, of the type YES/NO. Accreditation has gradually been replaced by quality assurance institution, based on a multicriterial evaluation system, not necessarily comparative. Harvey and Newton described the quality assurance system in 2004 as an evaluation system which distinguishes from the conformity objectives (classical for accreditation) by adoption of a different objective of self-evaluation for improvement and realization of public responsibility ideal (Harvey and Newton, 2004). The main problem which the two authors identified is that rarely the rational motivation of using an evaluation system or another (accreditation or quality assurance) is explicitly recognized. Thus, if accreditation is usually used by states to regulate and control the educational market, the term of quality assurance, even if theoretically it has other meanings, is used as substitute of accreditation, but its content (in terms of actions and objectives) is not changed.

Unlike accreditation, quality assurance supposes a variety of evaluation instruments; moreover, it does not have as objective the establishment of a contractual relationship between the state and universities. Quality assurance aims first of all at assurance of an informational transparency in decision-making regarding the functioning of university organizations. These elements are mandatory in view of observing the public responsibility principle and also, in the particular context of higher education, it is a solid argument in favour of supporting and defending the university autonomy principle. In other words, if the university wants to be autonomous it has to prove that it can administer itself and can provide significant information on the activities it carries out and their results.

Quality assurance is no longer today a general unspecified concept. According to the latest report of European University Association (EUA), *Trends 2015*, quality assurance is today a concept which encapsulates in fact two different dimensions. These dimensions are Internal quality assurance and External quality assurance.

If we go back to the relationship between accreditation and quality assurance and the evolution of these two institutions after 1993, we can note that it is relatively common to the states from Eastern and Central Europe. The case of Romania falls perfectly (Tomusk, 2004) within the trends from the geographical area where we are. Romania is the first country from this area to introduce accreditation as norm for the functioning of universities. The non-voluntary method of imposing the evaluation in view of accreditation is common to all Central and Eastern European states.

The accreditation institution produced in a predictable way an effect of organizational isomorphism which shortly led to the copying and assimilation of practices and organizational behaviours considered desirable by universities. The organizational isomorphism which accreditation caused meant that between the study programmes, their results or even between universities there are fewer and fewer differences. Recent studies confirm this tendency. For example, a study regarding the scientific performance of universities, measured by synthetic indicators shows that only a few universities of Romania have significantly different results (Viiu et al., 2012).

Coercive isomorphism which the accreditation generated was consolidated by the external evaluation methodology used by ARACIS since 2006. The predominance of

indicators which measure inputs, the entry elements in educational process and the orientation to checking and control activities in visits for external evaluation of quality are the main causes for isomorphism. The causes and consequences have already been debated and analysed in several studies previously published such as Quality Barometers 2009 – 2011. In this context, the reform of quality assurance process is obviously justified. We consider that a conceptual clarification of the difference and role of external assurance and internal assurance of quality represents a starting point in the passage from Leviathan model (Paunescu et al., 2012), which existed during 1993 - 2007 to a flexible model centered on cooperation and institutional development.

In other words, the role that internal quality assurance systems have in the wider context of quality development should become a central role. The adverse effects produced by the centralized quality assurance model such as structural isomorphism, homogeneity, the effect of institutional conformity or substitution of objectives (Paunescu et al., 2012) represent the main problems which a quality assurance system reform should have in view.

Almost all the universities from the states which adhered to “Bologna Process” now have quality assurance and evaluation systems which target at least one of the two dimensions: external or internal quality assurance. The report TRENDS 2015, published by EUA, shows that almost two thirds of the universities which participated in this study have integrated quality assurance policies. The Romanian Universities declare that such policies and mechanisms are relatively widespread in higher education system. However, the previous studies show that the internalization of internal quality assurance practices in the organizational culture of universities is still less accomplished. In other words, even if formally such regulations exist, they are not operational yet and have not turned into current and routine organizational practices.

4.3.3 Quality assurance in Romania. Objective data

Quality assurance in Romania is the formal assignment of ARACIS, regarding external quality assurance and of higher education institutions regarding internal quality assurance. In fact, many institutions have important roles, but not always coordinated (concerted) in quality assurance.

- CNFIS elaborates a financing methodology in which, according to Law 1/2011 the supplementary financing for excellence is allotted by quality criteria. Most of the times, CNFIS collected data directly from HEIs, based on its own evaluation methodology. ARACIS was founded by Government Emergency Ordinance - GEO (organizational structure, exercise of management, assignments, method of financing)
- Law 1/2011 provides the annual hierarchization of study programmes and classification of universities; the first and only hierarchization (and classification) was accomplished in 2011 based on its own methodology adopted by OM; the data was collected directly from HEIs.

- ARACIS is authorized by the law to make its own regular evaluations in view of accrediting and recertifying the study programmes, but also higher education institutions. ARACIS is founded by the law, GEO 75/ 2005 further amended and supplemented, approved by Law 87/2006. A series of subsequent normative acts, government decisions regulate the organizational aspects, such as structure, exercise of management, assignments, method of financing). A deliberative forum on accreditation, ARACIS Council, although it was created as professional forum, by nomination of members by universities, adopts decisions based on the evaluations made based on a unique quality assurance methodology applicable both to institutions and study programmes and adopted at central level by government decision.

The system is prescriptive including internal quality assurance is regulated by the law (the functioning of internal quality assurance commission, its management, composition and assignments). External evaluation of quality of education is also stipulated by the law and contains explicitly among other things: evaluation of quality of study programmes offered, evaluation of accordance between internal evaluation and the real situation, comparative cross-institutional evaluation, but also the evaluation of quality management or institutional capacity. The Romanian quality assurance system is comprehensive, trying to include the majority, if not all the approaches mentioned above. In addition, the external evaluation methodology, the standards, reference standards and performance indicators are unitary at national level and are also established by Government Decision. The state is at the centre of quality assurance processes, even if the implementation and evaluations are performed by ARACIS, independent agency according to the law, but which operates based on unique approaches and methodologies established by the law.

In ARACIS, permanent specialized commissions work with assignments in the evaluation process of study programmes (validates the external evaluation reports), but also in establishment of standards specific to the fields of studies they represent. Specific standards are actually a presentation in detail of general, sometimes more restrictive standards, to which we can add curricular standards, lists of compulsory subjects by curricular areas. The specific standards of learning process are mainly content-focused. The latest revision of specific standards of certain commissions (e.g. psychology and administrative sciences) introduced compulsory elements regarding the learning results from the National Qualifications Register in Higher Education. The verifications on the field are made compared to the official documents of study programmes and not compared to learning results as they are demonstrated by the provider institution. The specialized commissions but also the Register of ARACIS Evaluators could be regarded as professional courts which make *peer-review* on specific fields of study. There are also requirements of professional nature, holding of didactic rank of associate professor or professor. However, the selection has rather in view the experience in quality assurance as it is instated by the law and ARACIS procedures. The selection of evaluators is made based on experience in

quality assurance, more precisely after going through a training session organized by ARACIS; the diversity of forms and methods of quality evaluation is not envisaged. The selection of members of specialized commissions is made by competition from among the evaluators based on the "experience of candidates in the field of academic quality assurance, their professional, scientific, research and managerial competences, their academic integrity"[87]. Just as in case of evaluators, the selection in specialized commissions is made based on the experience in implementation of ARACIS procedures, being targeted the socialization in the organization, commitment to its values, methods and procedures, rather than socialization in profession. The selection is made by ARACIS Council and operationally by the Council Office and not by a professional forum.

Therefore, quality assurance in Romania is made by direct regulations of the state, the coercive pressure being important. The professions have a minimal role in establishment of specific standards at the level of contents of study programmes. The selection of members of specialized commissions is regulated and accomplished by ARACIS Council based on own procedures and not by professional (self)-appointment. By external evaluation the fulfilment of minimal standards is controlled, by following the validation and accuracy of data and conclusions from external evaluation report. The emphasis is placed on the fulfilment of minimal standards and the attainment of the accreditation/regular certification. Most of evaluations target study programmes (even in institutional evaluations a sample of study programmes is evaluated); the decisions are accreditation/non-accreditation and determination by ARACIS Council's decision of a maximum number of students who can be schooled in the 1st year (schooling capacity).
The assessments are made on the basis of a unique methodology of internal/external evaluation imposed by the law and laborious and standardized internal procedures (although a certain standard structure is not stipulated, the consequence is that internal evaluation reports follow the structure of standards and indicators stipulated by the external evaluation methodology because in external evaluation visits the aim is the conformity, congruence between internal evaluation and the real situation). The results of evaluations are the type of accreditation/ regular certification or non-accreditation, but certain scores are given (limited confidence, confidence, and high degree of confidence). These scores should suggest an institutional ranking, but in reality, the differentiation degree is minimal (over 80% of institutional evaluations are completed with "high degree of confidence"), limited confidence is an accreditation with vulnerabilities which requires a new external evaluation visit in a shorter time than the general timeline of 5 years.

87 *http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/CV/Procedura_de_selectare_si_numire_a_noilor_membrii_ai_Comisiilor_de_experti_permanenti.pdf*

Out of 31 external institutional evaluations validated by ARACIS Council in 2015, 26 received the score “high degree of confidence”, one evaluation was finalized with “confidence", respectively “limited confidence”, and 3 received the score “lack of confidence". In the last cases we are talking about private, relatively new higher education institutions of small sizes, with poor institutional capacities; lack of confidence often sanctions the non-fulfilment of minimal requirements regarding legality (norms applicable to plans, states etc.), spaces, number of hours/workloads allotted to teaching staff or the exceeding of schooling capacity previously approved by ARACIS. In case of study programmes, the most frequent scores given are “confidence” with maintenance of accreditation, respectively “lack of confidence”. The situation of “limited confidence” is intermediary and implies a re-evaluation at shorter interval of time and/or by another commission. The sanctioning by giving scores inferior to maximal scores is made exclusively for the non-fulfilment of *input criteria*, not process or learning results. Thus, the other scores than maximal ones do not suppose a real differentiation, do not refer to different criteria (which would reflect different missions) and do not imply a vertical differentiation (hierarchy) according to performance, but are rather an accreditation conditioned by the remedy of deficiencies mostly of legal nature; they can be considered preliminary stages in attainment of the maximal score. The homogenization trend and lack of differentiation are the result of expression of performance indicators as descriptors of minimal standards or desirable referential situations, being apriori formulated (narratively) in external evaluation methodology.

The performance indicators are not numerically expressed, therefore they cannot take values which allow the differentiation of institutions/programmes, calculation of trends and references (*benchmarks*), but are expressed as judgments of value which can distinguish between non-fulfilment, fulfilment or superior fulfilment of standards (the last one is a theoretical possibility, in reality the evaluation reports only differentiate between the fulfilment and non-fulfilment of standards; the formulations of descriptors are rather ambiguous and hardly operable). By unique methodology and by attributions conferred by the law, ARACIS does not distinguish in any way between higher education institutions, it evaluates them based on the same criteria and standards and gives the same types of certifications and accreditations (institutional and programme).

Therefore, the Romanian quality assurance system concentrates on accreditation, based on an ample set of procedures which regulate the activities of internal quality reporting, the external evaluation visits, the activities of permanent specialized commissions, which approve the external evaluation reports and propose decisions to the Council, scores and schooling capacities and the Council validates these proposals. The most important rewards which ARACIS offers to higher education institutions refer to accreditation/non-accreditation and conditions of accreditation

(score and schooling capacity). Therefore, the emphasis is placed almost completely on checking the fulfilment of minimal standards, the accuracy of data from the internal evaluation and control report[88]. The external evaluation reports made by ARACIS *emphasize standardization* relating almost exclusively to the minimal compulsory requirements and the specific standards of the field of study (formulated by permanent commissions) which most often consisted of lists of subjects generally considered compulsory for certain programmes. The reports do not take into account and even discourage institutional diversity, *by evaluating the conformity degree of* plans of programmes with the list of subjects elaborated by the specialized ARACIS commissions. The imposition of a certain standardized curriculum to all the programmes from a certain field leads to a *nominal convergence* of curricula, promotes institutional homogeneity and sanctions diversity[89].

The functions of inter-institutional comparison (based on *benchmarks*) or quality improvement are rather absent from current activities. The unitary methodology, the poor differentiation of values of performance indicators associated to standards, the focus on minimal standards and the fulfilment of compulsory normative requirements for obtaining accreditation determines institutional isomorphism (Paunescu, Vlasceanu, Miroiu, 2011), as well as formalization and *ritualization of* quality assurance. Therefore, universities did not manage to institutionalize internal quality assurance as managerial instrument meant to enhance the quality of education (Paunescu, Vlasceanu, Miroiu, 2011, pp. 30-31).

Internal quality assurance is a simple administrative conformity achieved on the occasion of regular external evaluation visits, without being assimilated to internal management processes and without a significant impact on quality improvement. In the Report made by Geven et al. for The Executive Unit for Financing Higher

[88] The reports of ARACIS external visits are mostly narrative-descriptive, with detailed presentation of history, structures, memorandum and articles of association, regulations etc., presentation of visit stage, observations and remarks. Most of the times, an inferior score to "confidence" in programmes or "high degree of confidence" for the institution is substantiated on the non-fulfilment of normative requirements related to the charging of didactic workloads, elaboration of job title lists, lack of regulations, exceeding the schooling capacity etc. The observations regarding the non-fulfilment of requirements are most often highlighted in the reports of the technical department of ARACIS. The evaluation missions are mostly technical, following specific conformity elements and less peer-review. Therefore, the reports are very similar, very technical and very ample as a consequence of the fact that the structure of reports follows the structure of methodology and in some cases the verifications of fulfilment of normative requirements are very thorough, except for the reports of foreign evaluators, which consisted of general appreciations regarding the visited institution.

[89] A specific recommendation for the improvement of a programme, from an external evaluation report from the website of ARACIS, is formulated as follows: "revision of Curricula according to ARACIS standards specific to Economic Sciences field with reduction of number of subjects/hours allotted to the subjects according to the options of the institution", source: http://www.aracis.ro/uploads/media/ Raport Departament de evaluare 6887ae.pdf, p. 3. The programme received the score Confidence, while the institution received the score Lack of confidence because the university enrolled in some study programmes a higher number of students than the schooling capacity approved.

Education, Research, Development and Innovation - UEFISCDI, the *Analysis of internal quality assurance systems from the perspective of performance and adequacy*, it is concluded that "evaluations do not succeed to generate a significant reflection of academic community on higher education and scientific research". Concretely, it is mentioned in the report, the problems of quality assurance system are that the current evaluation practices are too bureaucratic, the professors and students do not feel involved in evaluations and at institutional level, there is not enough flexibility for the treatment of differences and innovation. As for internal quality assurance, the report mentions: "the actors on the field reject the quality assurance practices as useless and consider that they bring prejudice to university autonomy, for this reason they apply them in a superficial way – as a form of passive dissidence" (Geven et al., 2013, p. 30)[90].

The report of European Parliament regarding the impact of quality assurance policies in Member States mentions that the systems in which the methodology (of external evaluation - author's note) is participative and non-bureaucratic have a higher probability of positive impact. The systems in continuous development and reconfiguration have a higher probability of stimulating discussions inside institutions and in the higher education sector as a whole, avoiding the risk of transforming quality assurance from a promoter of institutional change and innovative thinking into a simple routine procedure (Wachter et al., 2015, p. 46).

Unfortunately, the external evaluation methodology of ARACIS did not undergo any major transformation since its adoption in 2005 by Government Decision, becoming largely irrelevant for most institutions which hold the high confidence score and represents an obstacle by bureaucratization and excessive formality to the development of a true quality culture.

Table IV. 1 The true vocation of the university is the teaching

UQ14. Research is important, but the true vocation of the university is the teaching	Frequencies	%	Valid answer percentage	Cumulative percentage
Not at all	17	1.9	1.9	1.9
To a very little extent	47	5.1	5.2	7.1
To a little extent	131	14.3	14.5	21.6
To a large extent	293	32.0	32.5	54.2
To a very large extent	413	45.1	45.8	100.0
Total	901	98.4	100.0	
Do not know / answer	15	1.6		
Total	916	100.0		

[90] *Available at http://www.politici-edu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Analiza-sistemelor-interne-de-asigurare-a-calitatii-din-perspectiva-performantei-si-a-adecvarii.pdf*

4.3.4 Perceptions on quality assurance in higher education in Romania. Data from online sociological surveys

Differentiation and diversity in perceptions on institutional mission and evaluation methods

The perceptions on optimal mechanisms for quality assurance are not unitary, which gives virtue to policies for supporting and encouraging the institutional diversity by flexibilization of external quality assurance approaches depending on the institutional mission undertaken. The teaching staff who considers that the main vocation of the university is research (*Table IV.*2) tends to pay greater importance to criteria from the sphere of research in evaluation of Romanian universities. The criteria which refer to the publications of teaching staff, patents or attraction of research grants were included in an index specific to research criteria (Cronbach Alpha = .846); the teaching staff gave grades on a scale from 1 to 10 depending on the importance of that criteria in evaluation of universities. The teaching staff who answered to larger and very large extent that the vocation of university is research paid a greater importance to these criteria compared to those who do not consider research as the true vocation of university (*Table IV.*2).

On the other hand, the criteria regarding the equipment of university, the services provided to students, the offer of optional courses, the programmes developed in collaboration with employers, the numerical ratio students/teaching staff, and the integration of graduates on the labour market were included in an index of criteria referring to teaching (Cronbach Alpha = .831). The teaching staff who consider that the teaching mission is the true vocation of university tend to pay greater importance to this set of criteria in comparison with the set of criteria referring to research activity.

Table IV. 2 The true vocation of university is research

UQ15. Teaching is important, but the true vocation of university is research	Frequencies	Percentages	Percentages valid answers	Cumulative percentages
Not at all	56	6.1	6.2	6.2
To a very little extent	154	16.8	17.1	23.3
To a little extent	389	42.5	43.1	66.4
To a large extent	234	25.5	25.9	92.4
To a very large extent	69	7.5	7.6	100.0
Total	902	98.5	100.0	
Do not know/answer	14	1.5		
Total	916	100.0		

As for the most important criteria for evaluation of a study programme, at the level of the whole sample of teaching staff, the most mentioned are human resources, contents of courses, number of graduates who find a job, material base, and practical

activities with students (*Table IV.*5). At the same time, for evaluation of teaching staff, the most mentioned criteria is the evaluations made by the students to professors, the elaboration of textbooks and course supports and next are mentioned the academic publications of teaching staff (type of publications indexed Web of Science, indexed BDI or author books/coordinates (*Table IV.*6).

There are also major differences according to the science branch of teaching staff. If for instance, for mathematics, nature sciences, biological and biomedical sciences, the publications indexed Web of Science are the most frequently mentioned criteria, followed by the evaluations made by students to professors and the elaboration of textbooks for courses, for those from humanities the most frequently mentioned criteria is the evaluations made by students to professors, the elaboration of textbooks and course supports and thirdly, the publication of books and for those from social sciences, the evaluations made by students to professors are followed by articles indexed BDI and thirdly, the elaboration of textbooks and course supports. Those who think to a very large extent that the true vocation of the university is the teaching, mention to a larger extent the criterion of evaluations made by students to professors, and the elaboration of textbooks and course supports among the evaluation criteria of teaching staff. On the other hand, those who think that the true vocation of the university is the teaching tend to mention more often the criterion of publications indexed Web of Science or BDI and then the evaluations made by students to professors.

There is thus a consistent empirical support for the real and coherent differentiation of the missions and institutional strategies, but also the careers of teaching staff according to the options and vision of academic community.

Table IV. 3 – Importance of research-specific criteria in institutional evaluation depending on the perceived vocation of university - research

	The true vocation of university is research			
	Not at all	To a very small extent	To a small extent	To large and very large extent
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
index importance of research-specific criteria (scale from 1 to 10)	5.69	6.70	7.57	8.27

The differences between means are significant at a significance level of .05, assuming equal variances.
Example of reading: Among those who answered "Not at all" to the question: To what extent do you agree with the statement: teaching is important, but the true vocation of the university is research", the average of grades given to items which reflect the importance of criteria specific to research in institutional evaluation is 5.69, while among those who agreed to a large and very large extent with the statement above, the average of grades given to the same items is 8.27.

Table IV. 4 – Importance of education-specific criteria depending on the perception of teaching mission of university

	The true vocation of university is teaching		
	To a very small extent	To a small extent	To large and very large extent
	Mean	Mean	Mean
index importance of criteria specific to education/teaching (scale from 1 to 10)	7.58	8.11	*8.15*

Example of reading: Among those who answered "To a very small extent" to the question: To what extent do you agree with the statement: research is important, but the true vocation of university is the teaching, the average of grades given to the items which reflect the importance of specific criteria for evaluation in institutional evaluation is 7.58, while among those who agreed to large and very large extent with the statement above, the average of grades given to the same items is 8.15.

Table IV. 5 – The most frequent criteria for evaluation of a study programme

Criteria for evaluation of quality of a study programme:	**Frequencies**	**%**	**Percentage of cases**
The most frequent criteria for evaluation of study programmes	N		
NQ86. Financial resources	90	3.3%	9.9%
NQ87. Human resources	566	20.5%	62.2%
NQ88. Material base	373	13.5%	41.0%
NQ89. Efficiency of administration	40	1.4%	4.4%
NQ90. Research activities (value of research projects contracted)	136	4.9%	14.9%
NQ91. Contents of courses	440	15.9%	48.4%
NQ92. Practical activities with students	368	13.3%	40.4%
NQ93. Publications of teaching staff	151	5.5%	16.6%
NQ94. Impact factor of magazines in which the publications of teaching staff appear	41	1.5%	4.5%
NQ95. Number of readings (index H) of works of teaching staff	38	1.4%	4.2%
NQ96. Graduation rate	67	2.4%	7.4%
NQ97. Number of graduates who find a job	449	16.3%	49.3%
Total	2759	100 %	303.2%

Table IV. 6 – The most frequent criteria for evaluation of teaching staff

Criteria for evaluation of teaching staff	**Frequencies**	**%**	**Percentage of cases**
The most frequent criteria for evaluation of teaching staff			
UQ02.1. Publications Web of Science (former ISI)	393	14.9 %	44.1%

UQ02.2. Publications BDI	372	14.1 %	41.8%
UQ02.3. Books (of author and coordinates) published in Romania	386	14.6 %	43.3%
UQ02.4. Books (of author and coordinates) at international publishing houses	177	6.7%	19.9%
UQ02.5. Chapters in books published in Romania	82	3.1%	9.2%
UQ02.6. Chapters in books published abroad	100	3.8%	11.2%
UQ02.7. Evaluations made by students to professors	544	20.6 %	61.1%
UQ02.8. Evaluations received from colleagues	105	4.0%	11.8%
UQ02.9. Elaboration of textbooks and course support	476	18.1 %	53.4%
Total	2635	100. 0%	295.7%

On the other hand, as for the evaluation methods of quality of higher education study programmes, the answers converge to a national system of performance indicators (almost 42% of respondents), followed by an evaluation method based on reputation, which means based on the opinions of those involved in university life (teaching staff, students, employers etc.), option chosen by almost 30% of respondents. The current external evaluation method, based on the regular evaluation visits of experts in quality assurance is the option of only 18% of respondents (*Table IV.* 7). We can conclude that there is empirical support for a change in the external evaluation methodology based on objective and comparable quality indicators which establish reference standards (*benchmarks*).

Perceptions of teaching staff regarding the quality of higher education institutions

Table IV. 7 - The most efficient method of external evaluation of a study programme

The most efficient evaluation method of quality of higher study programmes?			
	Frequency	%	Valid percentages
National system of performance indicators	364	39.7	41.7
Regular evaluation visits of experts in evaluation	156	17.0	17.9
Analysis of documents	76	8.3	8.7
Self-evaluation	22	2.4	2.5
Opinions of teaching staff, students, employers, etc.	254	27.7	29.1
Total	872	95.2	100.0
I do not know/answer	44	4.8	
Total	**916**	**100**	

Public education continues to enjoy greater confidence among teaching staff, compared to the private higher education institutions. Thus, the average of grades given by teaching staff on a scale from 1 to 10 regarding the perceived quality of higher state education institutions is 7.81, while the average of grades given to private higher education institutions is only 4.32 (*Table IV.* 10).

Apart from the public/private distinction, perceptions also differ according to the perceived vocation of the university. The teaching staff who consider that although teaching is important, the true vocation of the university is research have a better perception about the competitiveness of their higher education institution. Thus, at the question *In your opinion, the university where you work and to which you are affiliated is from the point of view of quality of research activities* a larger percentage of those who think that the vocation of university is research consider that their university is the best, 14,2%, compared to 9,2% from among those who think that the true vocation of the university is the teaching (*Table IV.* 8).

Table IV. 8 – Perception of positioning of own university depending on the research activity

In your opinion, the university where you work and to which you are affiliated is from the point of view of research activity				
		The vocation of university is teaching	**The vocation of university is the research**	**Total**
Among the other 75% universities of the country	Frequency	80	35	97
	Percentage	12.3%	12.1%	11.6%
Among the first 25% universities of the country	Frequency	214	72	260
	Percentage	33.0%	24.9%	31.1%
Among the best 10 % universities of the country	Frequency	294	141	388
	Percentage	45.4%	48.8%	46.4%
The best university of the country	Frequency	60	41	91
	Percentage	9.3%	14.2%	10.9%
Total	Frequency	648	289	836
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

At the question *In your opinion, the university where you work and to which you are affiliated is from the point of view of quality of teaching activities*, 16,5% of those who think to a large and very large extent that the vocation of the university is research think that their university is the best of the country, while 12.5% of those who think that the vocation of the university is teaching think that their university is the best of the country. This data suggests either that in universities perceived as the best there is a larger percentage of those who think that the true mission of the university is

research, or that the latter have a better self-perception regarding the higher education institution to which they are affiliated (*Table IV.* 9).

Table IV. 9 – Perception of positioning of own university depending on the teaching activity

In your opinion, the university where you work and to which you are affiliated is from the point of view of teaching activity				
		The vocation of university is the teaching	The vocation of university is research	Total
Among the other 75% universities of the country	Frequency	53	26	63
	Percentage	8.0%	8.9%	7.4%
Among the first 25% universities of the country	Frequency	173	76	216
	Percentage	26.1%	26.1%	25.4%
Among the best 10 % universities of the country	Frequency	355	141	452
	Percentage	53.5%	48.5%	53.1%
The best university of the country	Frequency	83	48	121
	Percentage	12.5%	16.5%	14.2%
Total	Frequency	664	291	852
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table IV. 10 – Averages of grades given to the public/private education

Averages of grades (on a scale from 1 to 10) given to the public/private education					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
NQ03a. What grade do you give to private universities?	762	1	10	4.32	2.478
NQ03b. What grade do you give to state universities?	870	1	10	7.81	1.492
QN1.1a. Teaching and training in public universities	867	1	10	7.84	1.447
QN1.1b. Teaching and training in private universities	735	1	10	4.67	2.389
QN1.2a. Infrastructure and equipment in public universities	862	1	10	7.28	1.809
QN1.2b. Infrastructure and equipment in private universities	662	1	10	6.29	2.395
QN1.3a. Ethics and academic integrity in public universities	855	1	10	7.51	1.845
QN1.3b. Ethics and academic integrity in private universities	678	1	10	5.02	2.629
QN1.4a. Connection with labour market in	849	1	10	7.47	1.690

public universities					
QN1.4b. Connection with labour market in private universities	636	1	10	5.64	2.485
Valid N (list wise)	575				

Quality assurance – transparency instrument in higher education? Perceptions of students.

The perceptions of students regarding the quality of higher education differ depending on several issues. First of all, the form of property is just like in case of teaching staff, a characteristic depending on which the higher education institutions are distinctly perceived. Thus, if the average of grades given to public universities is 7.50, in case of private universities the average is 4.85. The dispersion of grades is higher for private universities than for the public ones.

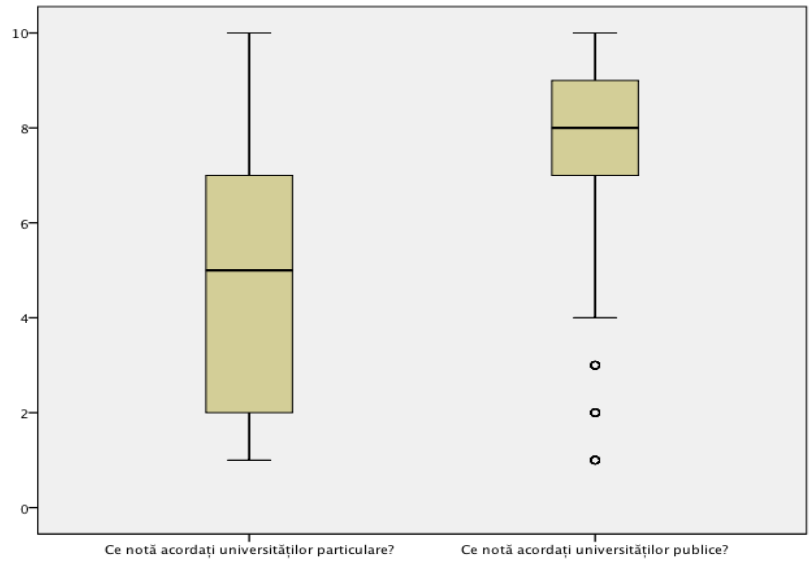
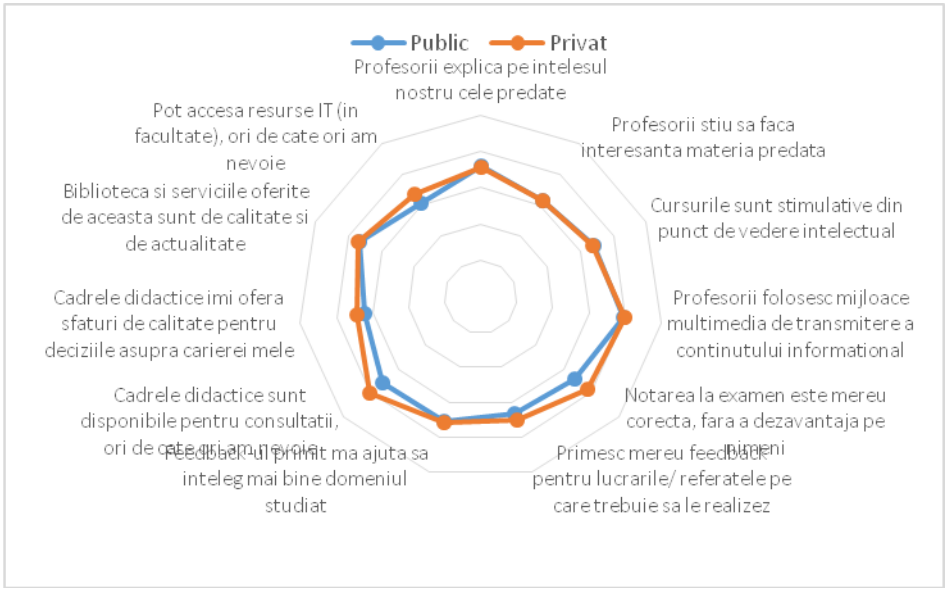


Figure IV. 3 – Distribution of grades given to public/private universities

What grade do you give to private universities?
What grade do you give to public universities?

Besides the significant difference between the global appreciation of public and private universities common to students and teaching staff, the average values recorded show a relatively high dissatisfaction including regarding the quality of universities. The average value of global appreciation of public universities of 7.62 cannot be considered encouraging. It is interesting that this time, unlike the similar research carried out in the period 2009 – 2011, the evaluation made by teaching staff is close as value (7.81) to the evaluation made by students. In other words, we assist

to an interesting phenomenon of unanimously critical appreciation of quality of Romanian universities, opinion shared by the most important social groups who form the academic community: the students and teaching staff. Even if they are similar, the evaluations have different explanations, the teaching staff and the students are dissatisfied with different aspects of university life.

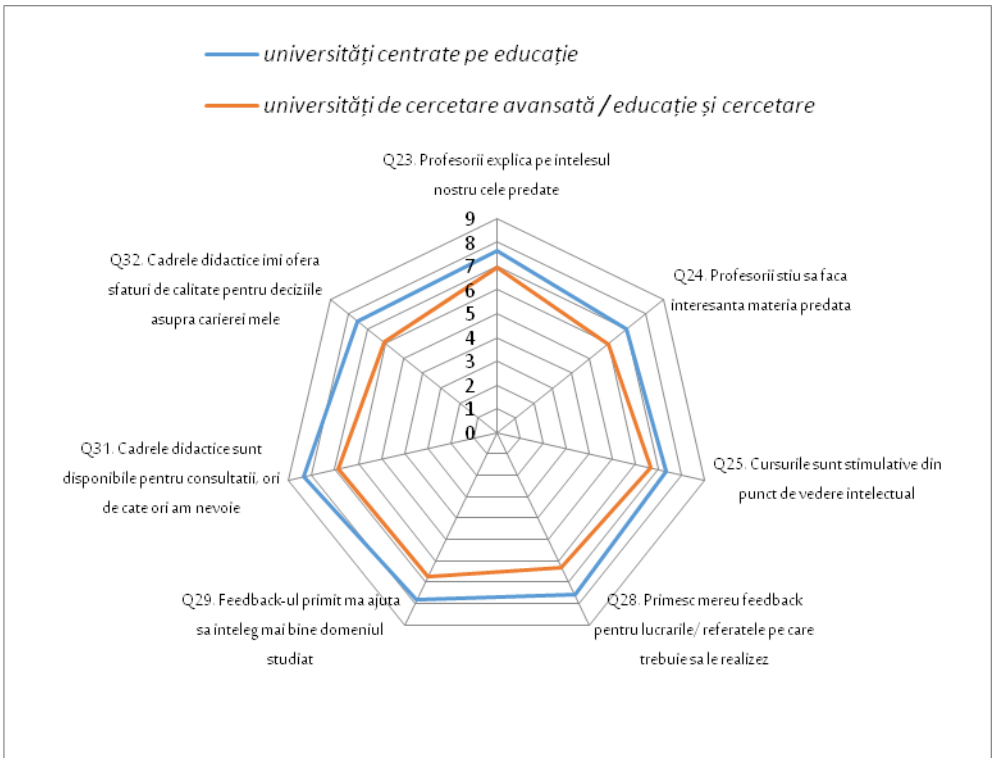


- *public* - *private*

The professors explain the subject they teach to our understanding.
I can access IT resources (in the faculty) whenever I need.
The library and the services offered by the library are of quality and topical.
The teaching staff offers me quality advice for decisions regarding my career.
The teaching staff is available for consultations whenever I need.
The feedback I receive helps me understand better the studied field.
The professors know how to make the taught subject interesting.
The courses are stimulative from intellectual point of view.
The professors use multimedia means for transmission of informational content.
The grading at examination is always fair without putting anyone at a disadvantage.
I always receive feedback for the works/reports I have to make.

Figure IV. 4 Evaluation by students of public and private universities depending on different dimensions

In case of students the relevant aspects relate to the way in which they perceive the quality of didactic activities as well as the access to educational resources or the interaction with teaching staff.



Education-oriented universities
Universities of advanced research/education and research
Q23.The professors explain the subject matter taught to our understanding.
Q24. The professors know how to make the subject taught interesting.
Q25. The courses are stimulative from intellectual point of view.
Q28. I always receive feedback for the works/reports I have to make.
Q29. The feedback I receive helps me understand better the studied field.
Q31. The teaching staff is available for consultations whenever I need.
Q32. The teaching staff offers me quality advice for decisions on my career.

Figure IV. 5 Evaluation by students of different dimensions in universities of advanced research/research and education compared to the education-oriented universities

The evaluation made by students from public and private universities regarding different dimensions of university activities is generally similar. The average values of grades given to different dimensions can be found in *Table IV.* below and generally indicate a relative uniformity of perceptions on universities. The differences recorded are paradoxally to the detriment of public universities. Thus, the students from public universities evaluate significantly differently the correctness of grading in examinations, the availability of teaching staff to provide consultations and access to

IT resources in the faculty. These evaluations are apparently paradoxal if the global evaluation is to the detriment of private universities.

The statistical analysis of grades given globally to public and private universities shows that the difference is mainly due to students from public universities who evaluate significantly differently (by about 2 points less) private universities. In other words, we can consider as work hypothesis that private universities are dealing with a rather negative representation when they are regarded from the outside, but they are not fundamentally different from the public universities when they are evaluated by their own students. On the other hand, the students from education-oriented universities are less demanding than their colleagues from the universities of advanced research/research and education. The differences between averages are between .691 and 1.495, the students from research universities give each time superior grades than their colleagues from the universities oriented to research/ research and education. The differences are significant, using the test t, at significance level $p < .05$.

Table IV. 11 – Evaluation of dimensions of university life (average values, public/private)

Item	Average evaluation		Average difference	Significance level (test t)
	Public	Private		
The grading at examination is always fair without putting anyone at a disadvantage	6,85	7,74	- 0,889	0,001
The teaching staff is available for consultations whenever I need	7,15	8,02	-0,870	0,000
I can access IT resources (in the faculty) whenever I need (e.g. computers, software, access to Internet, printers, scanners, etc.)	6,09	6,70	-0,605	0,05

Another important element in evaluation of Romanian universities from the perspective of students is the comparison they make between the Romanian university system and other similar systems from other states. To the question whether the Romanian higher education system is as good as the higher education systems from Western Europe, about 43.7% of students answered that they agree with this statement to a large and very large extent. Only 14.3% of the persons who answered this question think that such a statement is not at all true.

Table IV. 12 – To what extent do you agree with the statement that higher education in Romania is as good as the Western European states?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentages
Valid	Not at all	110	12,3	14,3
	To a very small extent	118	13,2	15,3

	To a small extent	206	23,0	26,7
	To a large extent	248	27,7	32,2
	To a very large extent	89	9,9	11,5
	Total	771	86,0	100,0
Missing	I do not know/answer	125	14,0	
Total		896	100,0	

The differences recorded regarding the answers to this question among the students from public universities and their colleagues from private universities are insignificant. We can therefore conclude that in reality, from the perspective of students there are no major differences between universities depending on their form of property. It is true that the students from private universities tend to be relatively more satisfied when they evaluate certain dimensions of university life compared to those from public universities. These differences can be due to a different subjective perception which has other explanatory factors beyond the form of property of the university. What stands out is rather a negative image which private universities have among students who are not enrolled in them, which determines a difference of global appreciation of these universities.

Table IV. 13 – Evaluation of university courses by students

Were you asked to evaluate the courses/seminars in which you participated in the university?	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentages
Yes, for all courses/seminars	240	26.4	28.2
Yes, for most courses/seminars	178	19.6	20
Yes, only for a few courses/seminars	233	25.6	27.3
No	208	22.9	24.5
I do not know	51	5.6	
Total	910	100	100

The course evaluation practices seem to be widespread, over 48% of students say that they were asked to evaluate most courses/seminars in which they participated during the university studies. Yet, more than half of them declare that they were occasionally or never asked to make such evaluations. The institutionalization of internal quality assurance mechanisms does not seem to be uniform in higher education institutions. A more difficult situation is the transparency of results of these evaluations. Over 60% of students declare that they were never told the results of these evaluations, while only 25% claim that they learned their results always or in most cases.

Table IV. 14 – Transparency of evaluation results

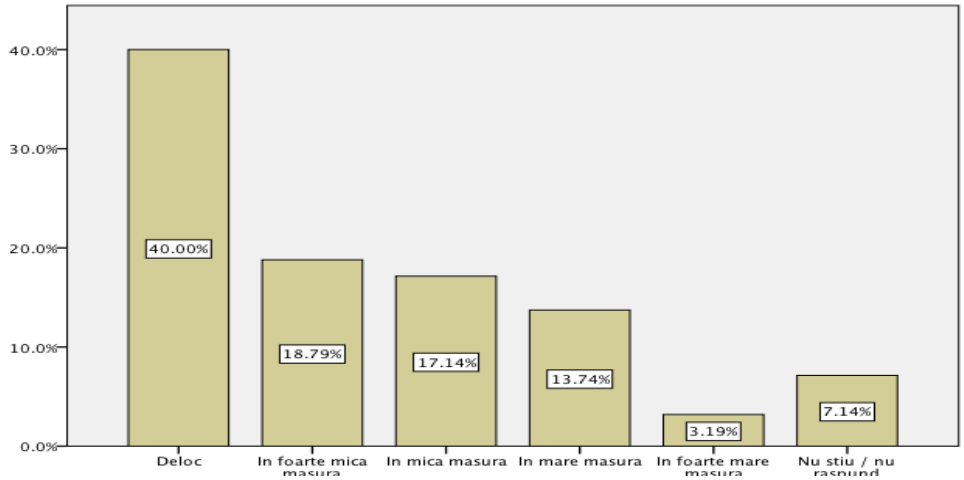
Were you informed of the results of these evaluations?	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentages

Yes, always	104	11.4	14.27
Yes, for most evaluated courses	81	8.9	11.11
Yes, only for a few evaluated courses	99	10.9	13.58
Never	445	48.9	61.04
Do not know/answer	181	19.9	
Total	910	100.0	100.0

Table IV. 15 – Sources of information in selection of provider of educational services

How important were the following sources of information in the selection of the university/faculty you attend? (1 not at all important, 10 very important)	N	Average	Standard deviation
a website of university/faculty/specialization you attend	897	7.02	3.029
b printed brochures of university/faculty/study programme	884	5.13	3.220
c press articles	877	3.94	3.010
d university hierarchies	877	4.90	3.188
e Website of public authorities – Ministry of Education	866	3.54	2.909
f Website of ARACIS	841	3.07	2.762
g Recommendations of someone who studies/studied there	886	6.80	3.174
h Educational fairs	856	4.28	3.239
Valid answers for all items	815		

From among the sources of information used by the students, the most important ones are the websites of providers of educational services, but also the recommendations of those who study there. We can see that the websites of authorities and the website of ARACIS which certifies the quality of education services providers are not considered by the students as relevant sources of information for the decisions they make. The average is 3 in case of ARACIS website, and the smallest standard deviation shows that there are not very ample variations around this reality. Moreover, over three quarters of students declare that they do not know at all (40%), know little or very little about the assignments and functioning of ARACIS, while about 17% declare that they have knowledge of the functioning and assignments of ARACIS to a large and very large extent. The role of external quality assurance as transparency instrument among the beneficiaries of higher education is much reduced; it rather has a control role. The technical nature, the breadth and the low relevance of information from external evaluation reports limit very much the informational potential of these reports for the general public.



To what extent do you think that you are informed of the assignments and functioning of Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education?

Not at all
To a very small extent
To a small extent
To a large extent
To a very large extent
I do not know/answer

Figure IV. 6- Self-evaluation of knowledge regarding the assignments and functioning of ARACIS

Conclusions

In this subchapter we tried to make an analysis of quality assurance mechanisms based on objective data and on the perceptions of the main actors of higher education system, teaching staff and students. The methodology for external evaluation of universities and study programmes is not able to make a relevant evaluation which makes a difference between the levels of institutional performance and programme performance, beyond the fulfilment of minimal normative conditions. The procedure is based on accreditation and control, produces conformism and discourages the development of internal quality assurance mechanisms. The reports drawn up by ARACIS do not fulfil the role of transparency instruments as they are not really used by students in making decisions in the selection of education provider. The knowledge by students of the mode of functioning and assignments of ARACIS is minimal for more than one third and non-existent for almost half of the interviewed students.

The use of ARACIS website is on the last place in the information sources used by students. The technical nature and to a large extent, lack of relevance of information contained in these reports (information related to the fulfilment of legal operation requirements, but not information regarding the learning results), but also the lack of a real differentiation of higher education providers could be explanations for the lack of public confidence in the quality of these sources of information. At the same time,

internal quality assurance institutions are not known but by a small part of students. The internal evaluation of courses by the students is not institutionalized, which confirms the ritualization of self-evaluation and miming of internal quality assurance procedures.

On the other hand, the data of subjective nature shows us that there are premises of differentiations regarding the mission and the role of higher education, differentiations which could be the basis of policies for supporting the institutional diversity of education providers. On one hand, among the teaching staff we can see a differentiation of perceptions regarding the mission of higher education. Almost three quarters of the interviewed persons think that although the research is important, the true vocation of the university is the teaching; only 30% think that the true vocation of the university is research. Those who think that teaching is the true vocation tend to emphasize institutional evaluation indicators and programme indicators which measure the quality of education (evaluations made by students to professors, elaboration of textbooks and course supports, employability of graduates), and the other support to a larger extent indicators of scientific output (scientific articles, patents, international recognition). Others support to a larger extent an evaluation based on a national system of performance indicators instead of an evaluation based on external evaluation visits.

As for the opinions of students, even if there are relatively high levels of satisfaction for the educational services they receive, there are differences between the tendencies of students from universities oriented to research, respectively research and education, compared to the students from the universities focused on education. The grades given by the first are lower, on average by 1 point compared to the grades given by the latter, which demonstrates *different exigencies and expectations of* the students from these types of institutions. These different expectations can be in the opinion of the teaching staff premises for a real institutional differentiation.

4.4 Higher education and employability. Opinions and perceptions of teaching staff and students. Data from online sociological surveys

4.4.1 Skills and competences

1. What does it matter for the entrance in work life: relations or the professional competences acquired?

Getting a job is not only the result of a selection based on competences and certified skills, but also the direct effect of social networks (Christakis & Fowler 2009, Granovetter 1973, Hancean 2014). In other words, the chances of getting a job, most of the times, are not only related to the human capital (e.g. the professional profile of the candidate), but also to the relational capital of an individual (e.g. personal network). *Table IV.*16 illustrates the distribution of students' perceptions regarding a series of statements which refer to the effects which social networks and behaviour during the university studies have on the social success and employment on labour market.

Table IV. 16 On a scale from 1 to 10, state to what extent do you agree with the following statements (perceptions measured at students' level)

Statements	Type of university	
	public	private
	M (S.E.)	M (S.E.)
GQ1. The persons who have the right connections get the job they want	7.5 (.1)	7.1 (.2)
GQ2. School is important, but in life you need relations to succeed	6.6 (.1)	6.4 (.2)
GQ4. The better you learn during the faculty, the higher the chances of getting the desired job	7.3* (.1)	7.8* (.2)
GQ5. Those who have high grades in faculty succeed in life	5.5* (.1)	6.1* (.2)
GQ6. At employment always counts what you know, not who you know	7.0* (.1)	7.7* (.2)

*Note. Statistically significant differences for the sample level are marked by the symbol *. At the level of evaluation scale used, the minimal value is represented by the grade 1 ("total disagreement"), and the maximal value is represented by the grade 10 ("total agreement"). Table IV. features the average scores and between round brackets the standard error of the average. The data was generated at the beginning of university year 2015 – 2016, from the level of a sample of students with a volume n =896.*

A fast inspection of *Table IV.16* allows us to notice a few interesting things. First of all, the lack of confidence of the students who study in public universities, in the value of grades obtained in the university. The average score calculated at the level of sub-sample of students who learn in public universities is little over the "pass grade" (i.e. 5.5). In other words, the idea according to which the formal hierarchy during the study years is a predictor for success in life does not have strong support at the level of perceptions of students (see GQ5). Secondly, we can see that the students who learn in private universities are less optimistic than those from public universities regarding the impact that the knowledge assimilated during university has on their professional route. For example, the idea according to which school performance is positively associated with chances of getting the job desired (GQ2) is much widespread among the students who study in private universities. The third issue we want to highlight refers to the relatively high grades given by students to the important role that the "right connections" have in getting the "desired job" (see GQ1); these grades get closer to the maximal scale extremity of agreement.

By simplifying the information presented in the *Table IV.17* we can say that ***at employment always counts what you know, not who you know, but the persons who have the right connections get the job they want.*** In other words, what you know is important in getting hired, but the social networks apparently become critical in getting the job wanted.

Table IV. 17 On a scale from 1 to 10, state to what extent you agree with the following statements (perceptions measured at the level of teaching staff)

Statements	Type of university	
	public	private
	M (S.E.)	M (S.E.)
GQ1. The persons who have the right connections get the job they want	6,0 (.1)	5,5 (.3)
GQ2. School is important, but in life you need relations to succeed	5,6* (.1)	4,9* (.3)
GQ4. The better you learn during the faculty, the higher the chances of getting the desired job	8,2 (.1)	8,2 (.2)
GQ5. Those who have high grades in faculty succeed in life	6,7 (.1)	7,0 (.2)
GQ6. At employment always counts what you know, not who you know	7,1 (.1)	7,1 (.2)

*Note. Statistically significant differences for the sample level are marked by the symbol *. At the level of evaluation scale used, the minimal value is represented by the grade 1 ("total disagreement"), and the maximal value is represented by the grade 10 ("total agreement"). Table IV. presents the average scores and between round brackets the standard error of the average. The data was generated at the beginning of university year 2015 – 2016, from the level of a sample of teaching staff with a volume n =916.*

Table IV.17 illustrates the perceptions of teaching staff regarding the role of education in social success and at employment. In this context, we want to emphasize, first of all, that the teaching staff interviewed, regardless of the type of university to which they are affiliated, think that the acquisition of knowledge during the university studies represents a good predictor for getting the job desired (see GQ4). Secondly, we want to point out that in the opinion of teaching staff, success in life is rather an effect of grades obtained in university [considered the most likely a *proxy indicator* of the quality of the knowledge-assimilation process n.n.], and less a result of the action of social networks. Compare in this respect the average scores associated to items GQ5 and GQ2. Thirdly, the perceptions shared by the teaching staff do not vary according to the type of property of universities. The only statistically significant difference is represented by the average scores associated to the importance of social networks in social success. Yet, even if the teaching staff who work in public universities give on average statistically higher grades to the statement GQ2 (statement which points out the stronger impact of connections in relation to school), in general, the grades given by professors from the whole sample are lower (they gravitate around the median point of evaluation scale).

To synthesize the data from *Table IV.17*, we could say that the ***orientation of teaching staff is rather towards the positive association of educational process with social success and in employment and towards the ignorance of direct effects which the individual relational capital could have.***

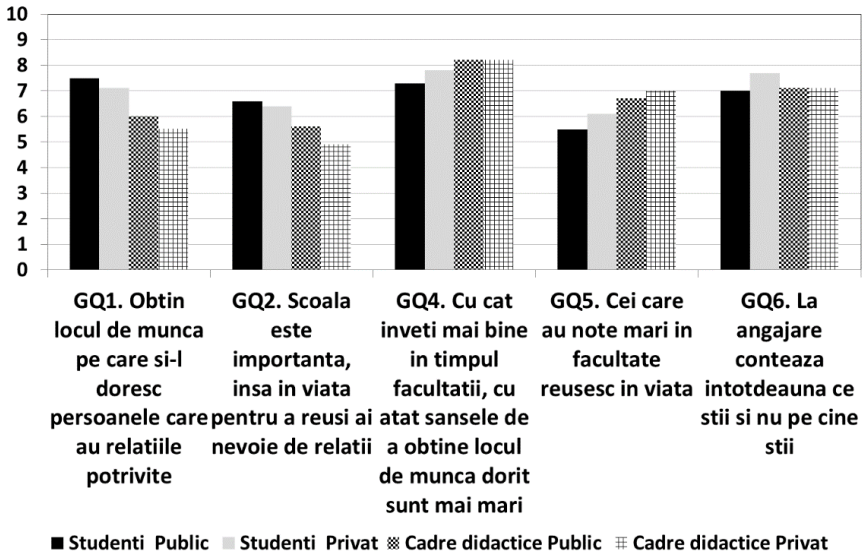


Figure IV. 7

GQ1. The persons who have the right connections get the job they want
GQ2. School is important, but in life you need relations to succeed
GQ4. The better you learn during the faculty, the higher the chances of getting the desired job
GQ5. Those, who have high grades in faculty are professionally successful
GQ6. At employment always counts what you know, not who you know
Students public
Students private
Teaching staff public
Teaching staff private

The variation of perceptions of teaching staff and students, depending on the type of university to which they are affiliated, regarding the impact of social networks and learning on success in life and at hiring.
Note. At the level of evaluation scale used, the minimal value is represented by the grade 1 ("total disagreement"), and the maximal value is represented by the grade 10 ("total agreement"). Figure IV presents the average scores. The data was generated at the beginning of university year 2015 – 2016, from the level of a sample of teaching staff in volume n =916 and a sample of students in volume n=896. The sub-samples have the following volumes: students from public universities – 687, students from private universities – 141, teaching staff from public universities – 737, teaching staff from private universities – 100.

*Figure IV.*7 illustrates the distribution of perceptions regarding the impact of learning on success in life and at hiring at the level of four sub-samples (i.e. students from public and private higher education institutions, teaching staff from public and private higher education institutions). At a general sight, we can see the tendency of students (regardless of the type of university) of giving greater importance to the impact that social networks can have on career, unlike the teaching staff who rather emphasize the importance of the *school and learning.* Yet, it seems that ***both the students and***

the teaching staff share the idea that the chances of getting the desired job depend on how well the students learn during their university studies (the statement GQ4 has the highest average scores compared to the other statements).

Table IV. 18 On a scale from 1 to 10, state to what extent you agree with the following statements (perceptions measured at the level of students)

Fundamental field		GQ1. The persons who have the right connections get the job they want	GQ2. School is important, but you need connections to succeed in life	GQ4. The better you learn during the university, the higher the chances of getting the desired job	GQ5. Those e who get high grades in university succeed in life	GQ6. In employment always counts what you know, not who you know
		M (S.E.)	M (S.E.)	M (S.E.)	M (S.E.)	M (S.E.)
	Code 1	7.8 (.4)	6.9 (.4)	7.3 (.4)	5.9 (.4)	7.1 (.4)
	Code 2	7.0 (.2)	6.0 (.2)	7.4 (.2)	5.5 (.2)	7.6 (.2)
	Code 3	7.7 (.2)	6.9 (.2)	7.3 (.2)	5.5 (.2)	6.4 (.2)
	Code 4	7.4 (.1)	6.5 (.2)	7.4 (.1)	5.5 (.1)	7.2 (.1)
	Code 5	7.8 (.3)	6.9 (.3)	7.6 (.3)	5.5 (.3)	7.2 (.3)
	Code 6	6.4 (1.5)	6.1 (1.3)	6.6 (1.4)	5.4 (1.3)	5.7 (1.4)

Note: At the level of evaluation scale used, the minimal value is represented by the grade 1 ("total disagreement"), and the maximal value is represented by the grade 10 ("total agreement"). The data was generated at the beginning of university year 2015 – 2016, from the level of a sample of students in volume n=896. The specializations in which students learn were integrated in higher classes (fundamental fields) thus resulting the following volumes of sub-samples: Mathematics and nature sciences (code 1) – 43, Engineering Sciences (cod 2) – 217, Biological and biomedical sciences (code 3) – 126, Social Sciences (code 4) – 332, Humanities and arts (code 5) – 86, Sports and physical education science (code 6) – 7. Having in view the sub-representation at the level of general sample of field 6, Sports and physical education science, we suggest treating with reserve the average scores associated.

*Table IV.*18 features a general view of the way in which the perceptions of students vary by having as criterion the fundamental field in which the study programmes where they are enrolled are organized. The amplitude of average scores by each item does not exceed one unit (i.e. one point) which indicates a relatively low dispersion between the fundamental fields (because of decreased volume, we will ignore the sub-sample of students from the field *Sports and physical education science*). The grades show, on one hand, ***the low confidence of students in the fact that grades represent a predictor for success in life*** (see GQ5), ***and on the other hand the fact that the relations and how much you learn in university have a combined effect in professional success*** (GQ1 and GQ4). It is noteworthy that perceptions do not polarize across fields. It should also be investigated in future studies the reasons for which ***students tend to underestimate the "grades" as indicator of individual hierarchies of values in university.***

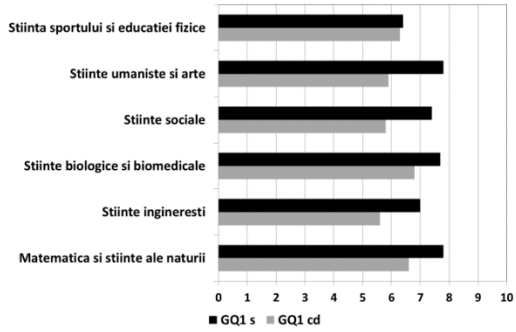
The grades given to the importance of school and social networks for professional career and social success do not vary across the fundamental fields of study (Figure 2). Both the teaching staff and the students indicate a high level of homogeneity between categories. For example, regardless of the fundamental field of study, on average, the teaching staff valorise much higher the importance of grades and "how much you learn" during university for getting the job desired. On the other hand, the students give on average higher grades to the impact that social networks have in getting the "desired job" and success in life. In addition, within each category (teaching staff, respectively students), the variation of scores by gender dimension is also statistically insignificant (see *Table IV.19*).

As for the way in which perceptions of students change across the study years, *Figure IV.*8 illustrates variations statistically insignificant. For example, the underestimation of grades as predictor of success in life tends to maintain constant and vary insignificantly around the average score six. Even if the average score given to the importance of learning during university for getting the desired job decreases with the advancement of students in the study years, this decrease is not statistically significant.

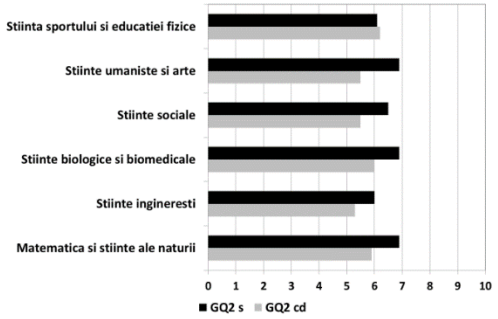
Table IV. 19 On a scale from 1 to 10, state to what extent you agree with the following statements (perceptions measured at the level of students and teaching staff by gender)

Statements	Students		Teaching staff	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
	M (S.E.)	M (S.E.)	M (S.E.)	M (S.E.)
GQ1. The persons who have the right connections get the job they want	7.5 (.1)	7.3 (.1)	5.7 (.1)	6.2 (.1)
GQ2. School is important, but in life you need relations to succeed	6.7 (.1)	6.3 (.2)	5.3 (.1)	5.7 (.1)
GQ4. The better you learn during the faculty, the higher the chances of getting the desired job	7.4 (.1)	7.3 (.1)	8.1 (.1)	8.3 (.1)
GQ5. Those who have high grades in faculty succeed in life	5.5 (.1)	5.8 (.1)	6.7 (.1)	6.7 (.1)
GQ6. At employment always counts what you know, not who you know	7.1 (.1)	7.2 (.1)	7.3 (.1)	6.9 (.1)

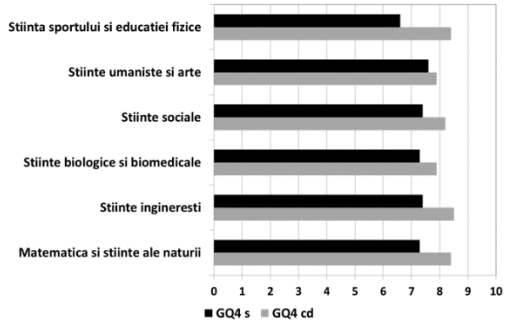
Note. At the level of evaluation scale used, the minimal value is represented by the grade 1 ("total disagreement"), and the maximal value is represented by the grade 10 ("total agreement"). The data was generated at the beginning of university year 2015 – 2016, from the level of a sample of students in volume n=896 (in which 65% represents female respondents) and a sample of teaching staff in volume n= 916 (in which 50% represents female respondents).



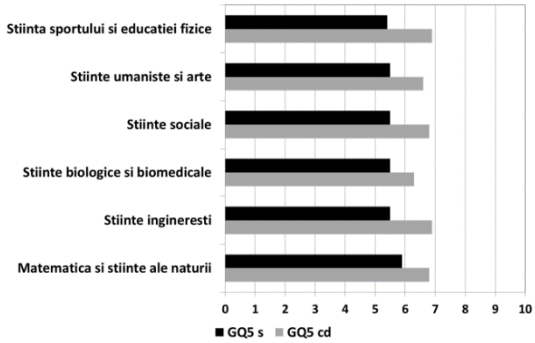
GQ1. The persons who have the right connections get the job they want



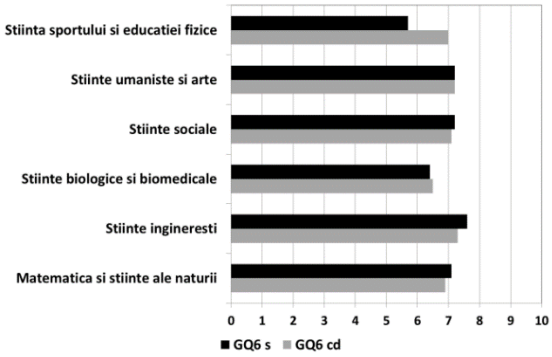
GQ2. School is important, but you need relations to succeed in life



GQ4. The better you learn during the faculty, the higher the chances of getting the desired job



GQ5. Those who have high grades in faculty succeed in life



Sport and physical education science
Humanities and arts
Social sciences
Biological and biomedical sciences
Engineering sciences
Mathematics and nature sciences

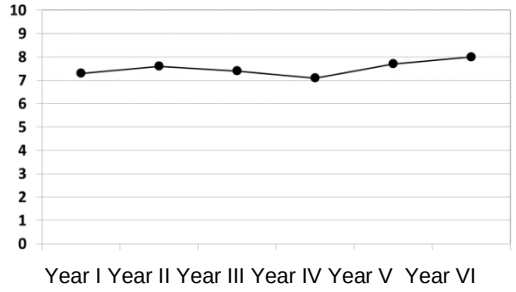
GQ6. At employment always counts what you know, not who you know

Figure IV. 8

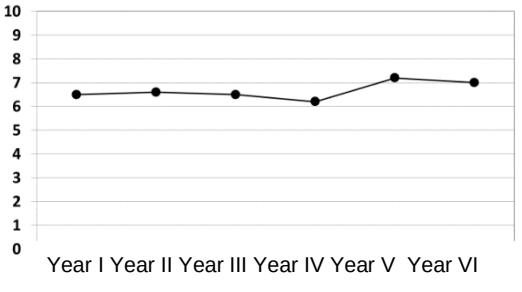
The variation of perceptions of students and teaching staff depending on the fundamental field in which the study programme to which they are affiliated is positioned. The measured perceptions refer to the positioning towards various statements which highlight the impact of social networks or the learning in the future professional career of students.

Note: At the level of evaluation scale used, the minimal value is represented by the grade 1 ("total disagreement"), and the maximal value is represented by the grade 10 ("total agreement"). The data was generated at the beginning of university year 2015 – 2016, from the level of a sample of students in volume n=896. The specializations in which students learn were integrated in higher classes (fundamental fields) thus resulting the following volumes of sub-samples: Mathematics and nature sciences (code 1) – 43, Engineering Sciences (cod 2) – 217, Biological and biomedical sciences (code 3) – 126, Social Sciences (code 4) – 332, Humanities and arts (code 5) – 86, Sports and physical education science (code 6) – 7. Having in view the reduced dimension of category Sports and physical education Science, we suggest ignoring the related scores. At figure level by the symbol „s" we mark the students and by the symbol „c.d." we mark the teaching staff.

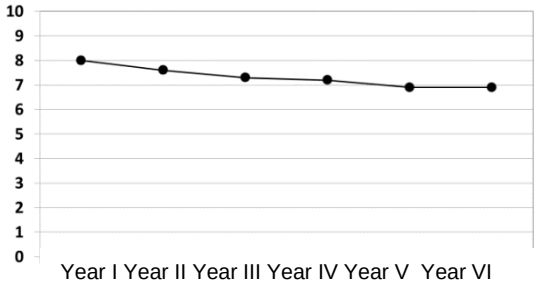
GQ1. The persons who have the right connections get the job they want



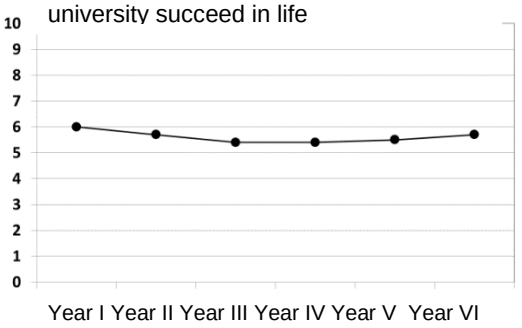
GQ2. School is important but in life you need connections to succeed.



GQ4. The better you learn during university, the higher the chances of getting the desired job



GQ5. Those who get high grades in university succeed in life



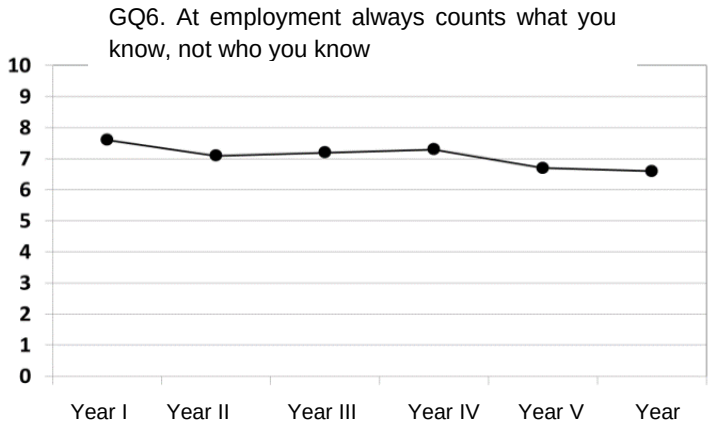


Figure IV. 9 Variation of perceptions of students depending on the study year.

The measured perceptions refer to the positioning towards various statements which highlight either the impact of social networks or the impact of learning on the future professional career.

Note. At the level of evaluation scale used, the minimal value is represented by the grade 1 ("total disagreement"), and the maximal value is represented by the grade 10 ("total agreement"). The data was generated at the beginning of university year 2015 – 2016, from the level of a sample of students in volume n=896. The scores were calculated with the following structure of sample: year I – 129 respondents, year II – 206, year III – 286, year IV – 157, year V – 64, year VI – 38 and additional study year– 16 (because of the law number of respondents, this last study year was not represented in the figure).

4.4.2 Perceptions regarding employability

The responsibility regarding the correspondence between the profile of competences of graduates and job requirements is shared between employers, universities and graduates. This is at least the perception embraced by teaching staff, students and employers. *Table IV.20* illustrates the dynamics of perceptions recorded at the level of three populations of respondents across three measurements made at different intervals. As you can see, the average scores for each category of respondents vary around the value three. The variation is extremely low, which indicates at least two things. On one hand, an intergroup agreement regarding the entities responsible for professional training and on the other hand, a high degree of stability of perceptions in time.

Table IV.20 To what extent each of the following social actors should assure that the graduates hold the skills and competences necessary to meet the job requirements?

	The responsibility belongs to employers			The responsibility belongs to universities			The responsibility belongs to graduates		
	2010	2011	2015	2010	2011	2015	2010	2011	2015
Employers:	3,2	3,4	-	3,3	3,4	-	3,4	3,5	-
Teaching staff:	3,1	3,2	3,1	3,3	3,4	3,4	3,5	3,5	3,4
Students:	3,0	3,0	2,9	3,2	3,2	3,3	3,5	3,4	3,4

Note. The scores vary on interval [1,5], where 5 represents the maximal value.

The perceptions of students regarding the usefulness of internships in professional training remain at a high level. As you can see from *Table IV.21*, the average scores calculated at the level of grades given by students, after four different measurements in time, vary around the value three (on a scale where the score four is the maximal threshold). As for employment perspectives, we can state that the students, in general, are rather optimistic, the average scores over the median point of measurement scale. The estimates of students regarding the employment chances at completion of studies are comparable to the estimates of teaching staff (see *Table IV.22*).

Table IV. 21 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

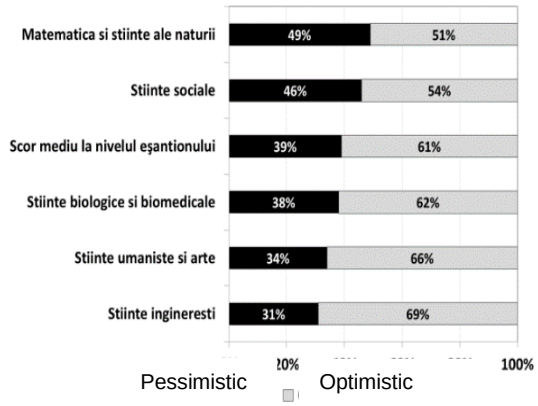
	2009	2010	2011	2015
The internships are really useful for my training	2,9	3,0	3,2	3,2
I do not think that I will have difficulties in finding a job after graduation	2,6	-	2,6	2,6
I do not think that I will have difficulties in finding the desired job after graduation	2,5	-	2,5	2,4
During the faculty I obtain all the skills and competences I need at the job.	2,5	2,7	2,6	2,7

Note. Table IV.21 Illustrates the scores for the perceptions of students. The scores vary on interval [0,4], where 4 represents the maximal value.

Table IV. 22 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

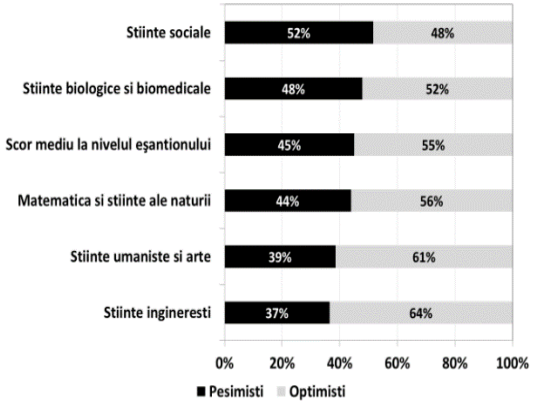
	2009	2010	2011	2015
After completion of studies, the students can easily find a job.	2,8	2,7	2,7	2,9
After completion of studies, the students can easily find a job in their field of specialization.	2,7	2,6	2,6	2,7

Note. Table IV.22 Illustrates the scores for perceptions of teaching staff. The scores vary on interval [0,4], where 4 represents the maximal value.



Mathematics and nature sciences
Social sciences
The average increase in the sample
Biological and biomedical sciences
Humanities and arts
Engineering sciences

Op 10. Pessimism regarding finding a job after completion of studies



Social sciences
Biological and biomedical sciences
The average increase in the sample
Mathematics and nature sciences
Humanities and arts
Engineering sciences

Op 11. Pessimism regarding finding the desired job after completion of studies

Figure IV. 10 Distribution of students' attitudes regarding finding a job and the desired job after completion of studies.

Note. The category of "optimistic" students reunites the respondents who declared that they agree to a large and very large extent with the fact that after the completion of studies they will not have difficulties in finding a job / the desired job.

In *Figure IV.*10, we present the way in which optimism in finding a job is distributed among students across the fundamental fields of study. We can see that the most optimistic students are concentrated in the category of those who learn in study programmes from engineering sciences: 69% of them think to a large and very large extent that they will not have difficulties in getting a job, and 64% will not have difficulties in getting the desired job. The students enrolled in programmes from social sciences field are the most pessimistic regarding the possibilities of getting the desired job (52%).

4.4.3 Professional development

*Table IV.*23 illustrates the perceptions of students, grouped by fundamental fields of study regarding the degree in which the attended faculty contributes to the formation of certain skills and competences needed at the job.

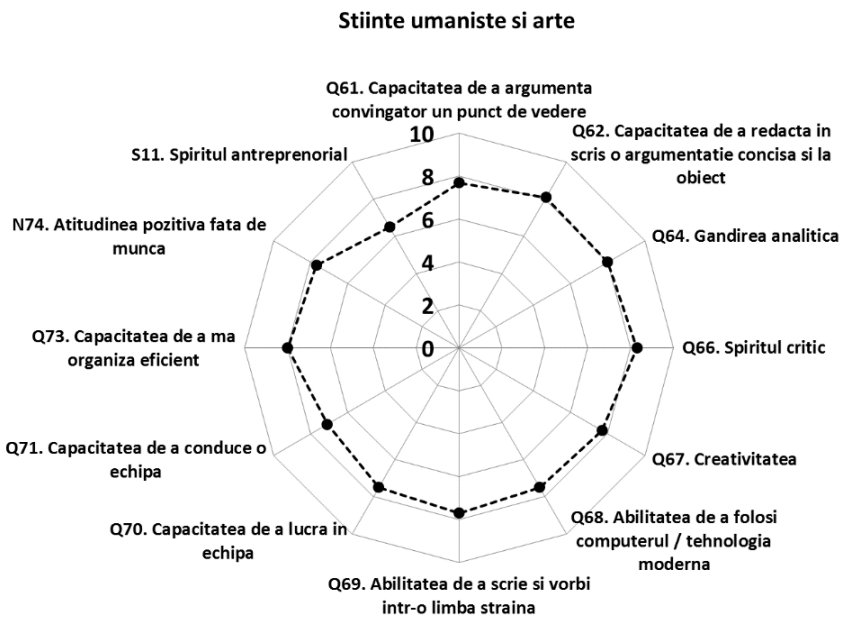
Table IV. 23 The degree in which the attended faculty contributes to the formation of the following skills and competences needed at the job... (perceptions of students)

	D4z. Fundamental field

	Mathematics and nature sciences	Engineering sciences	Biological and biomedical sciences	Social sciences	Humanities and arts
	Average score	Average score	Average score	Average score	Average score
Q61. Capacity to argue persuasively a point of view	6,4	***6,2***	6,4	7,6	***7,7***
Q62. Capacity to draw up in writing a concise and punctual argumentation	7,2	***6,1***	6,4	7,8	***8,1***
Q64. Analytical thinking	***8,1***	7,6	***7,1***	7,9	8,0
Q66. Critical spirit	7,8	***6,6***	7,0	7,9	***8,3***
Q67. Creativity	7,1	6,4	***5,6***	7,2	***7,7***
Q68. Computer skills/ modern technology skills	***8,1***	8,1	***5,9***	7,1	7,5
Q69. The skill of writing and speaking in a foreign language	6,5	6,1	***5,2***	6,7	***7,7***
Q70. Team work capacity	***7,7***	6,6	***6,3***	7,4	7,5
Q71. Team leading capacity	7,1	***6,1***	6,2	6,9	***7,1***
Q73. Efficient organization capacity	7,8	6,9	***6,9***	7,4	***8,0***
N74. Positive attitude to work	7,6	6,6	***6,4***	7,3	***7,7***
S11. Entrepreneurial spirit	6,5	5,9	***5,3***	***6,7***	6,5

Note. The study programmes to which the students who participated in the study are affiliated are distributed by fundamental fields of study. Table IV. 23 Illustrates average aggregate scores distributed from 1 to 10, where 10 represent the maximal threshold. For each fundamental field of study we highlight the skills which obtained the highest and the lowest average score. On rows, the maximal and minimal values are marked by underlined values. These values show the variation of contribution of each fundamental field of study to the formation of a skill.

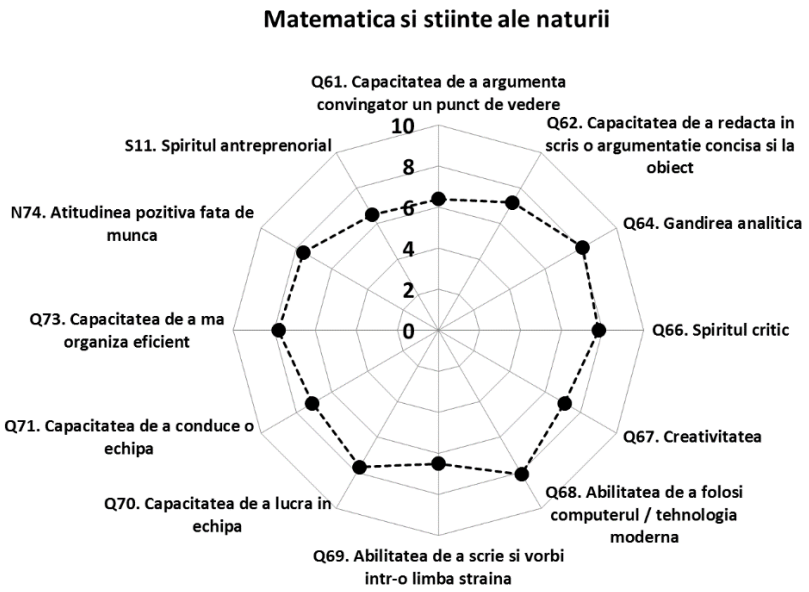
Table IV. 23 features at least the two types of information. The reading by columns (across each fundamental field of study) allows for identification of skills and competences with the highest and the lowest average score. The reading on rows (across skills and competences) allows for identification of fundamental fields of study which contribute the most and the least to the formation of skills and competences needed at work. Also, in Figures IV.11 –IV.15, which we illustrate below, the data was represented so as to allow for the identification of variation of degree of forming the skills and competences necessary at the job, at the level of each fundamental field of study.



Humanities and arts

Q61. The capacity to argue persuasively a point of view.
Q62. The capacity to draw up in writing a concise and punctual argumentation.
Q64. Analytical thinking
Q66. Critical spirit
Q67. Creativity
Q68. The computer skill/modern technology skill
Q69. The skill of writing and speaking a foreign language
Q70. Team work capacity
Q71. Team leading capacity
Q73. Efficient organization capacity
N74. Positive attitude to work
S11. Entrepreneurial spirit

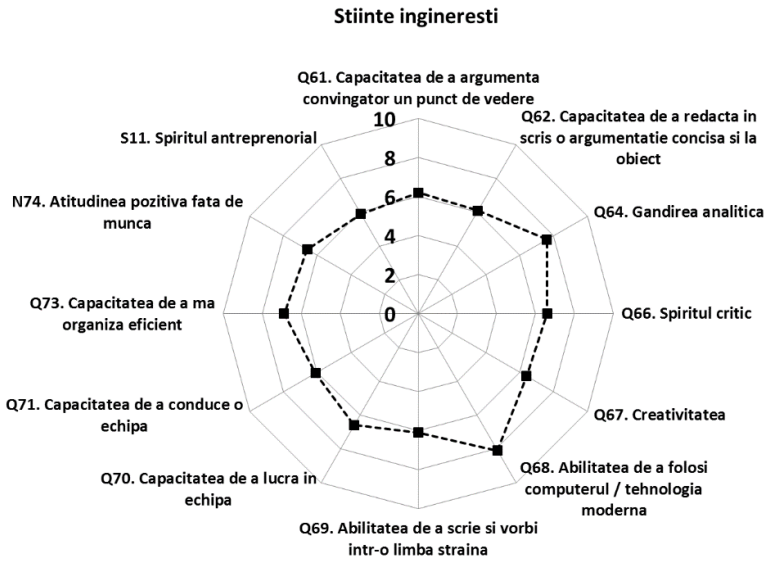
Figure IV. 11 Perceptions of students from the fundamental field of study Humanities and arts *regarding the degree in which the faculty they attend contributes to the formation of certain skills and competences necessary at workplace*



Mathematics and nature sciences

Q61. The capacity to argue persuasively a point of view.
Q62. The capacity to draw up in writing a concise and punctual argumentation.
Q64. Analytical thinking
Q66. Critical spirit
Q67. Creativity
Q68. The computer skill/modern technology skill
Q69. The skill of writing and speaking a foreign language
Q70. Team work capacity
Q71. Team leading capacity
Q73. Efficient organization capacity
N74. Positive attitude to work
S11. Entrepreneurial spirit

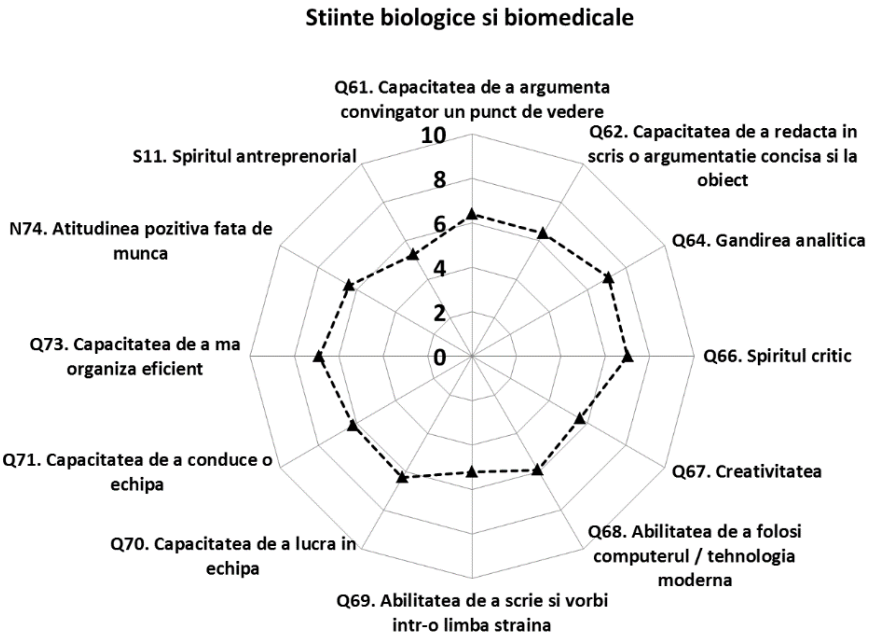
Figure IV. 12 Perceptions of students from the fundamental field of study Mathematics and nature sciences *regarding the degree in which the faculty they attend contributes to the formation of certain skills and competences necessary at workplace*



Engineering sciences

Q61. The capacity to argue persuasively a point of view.
Q62. The capacity to draw up in writing a concise and punctual argumentation.
Q64. Analytical thinking
Q66. Critical spirit
Q67. Creativity
Q68. The computer skill/modern technology skill
Q69. The skill of writing and speaking a foreign language
Q70. Team work capacity
Q71. Team leading capacity
Q73. Efficient organization capacity
N74. Positive attitude to work
S11. Entrepreneurial spirit

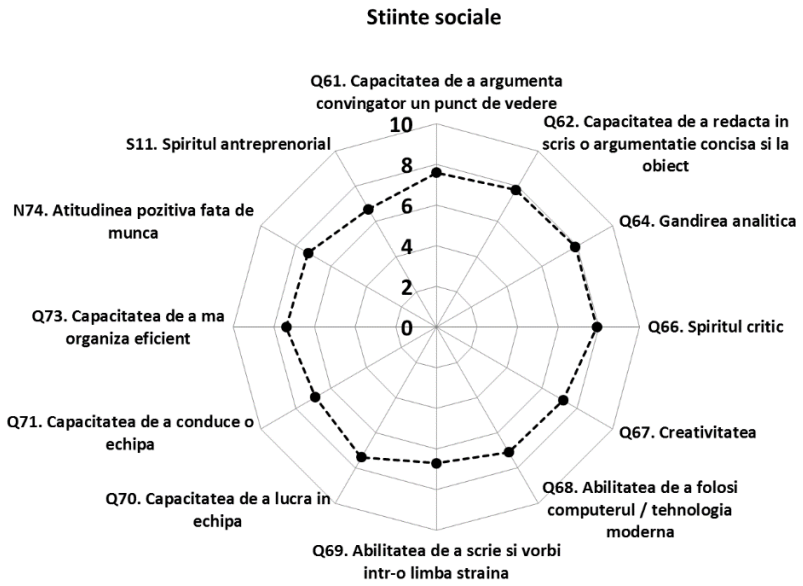
Figure IV. 13 Perceptions of students from the fundamental field of study Engineering Sciences *regarding the degree in which the faculty they attend contributes to the formation of certain skills and competences necessary at workplace*



Biological and biomedical sciences

Q61. The capacity to argue persuasively a point of view.
Q62. The capacity to draw up in writing a concise and punctual argumentation.
Q64. Analytical thinking
Q66. Critical spirit
Q67. Creativity
Q68. The computer skill/modern technology skill
Q69. The skill of writing and speaking a foreign language
Q70. Team work capacity
Q71. Team leading capacity
Q73. Efficient organization capacity
N74. Positive attitude to work
S11. Entrepreneurial spirit

Figure IV. 14 Perceptions of students from the fundamental field of study Biological and biomedical sciences *regarding the degree in which the faculty they attend contributes to the formation of certain skills and competences necessary at workplace*



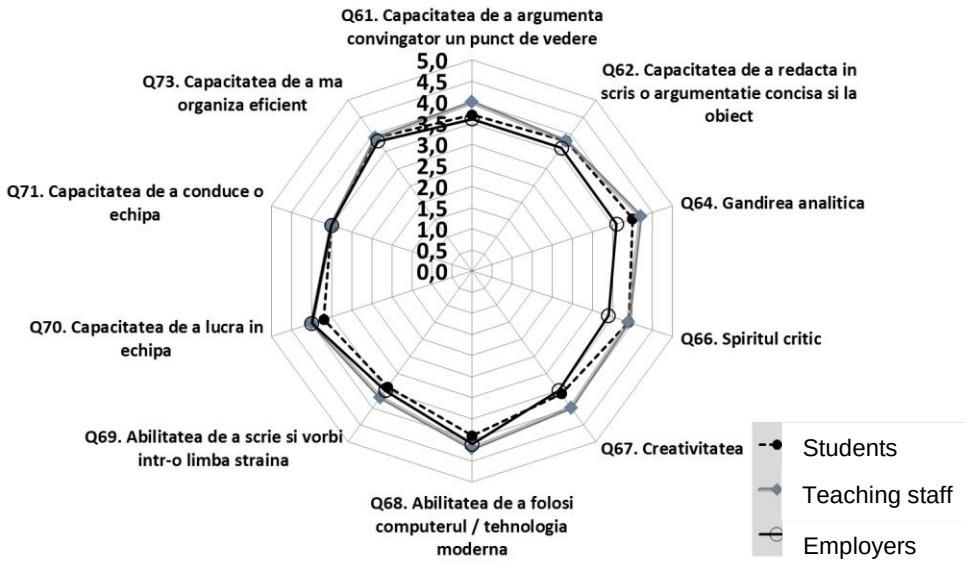
Social sciences

Q61. The capacity to argue persuasively a point of view.
Q62. The capacity to draw up in writing a concise and punctual argumentation.
Q64. Analytical thinking
Q66. Critical spirit
Q67. Creativity
Q68. The computer skill/modern technology skill
Q69. The skill of writing and speaking a foreign language
Q70. Team work capacity
Q71. Team leading capacity
Q73. Efficient organization capacity
N74. Positive attitude to work
S11. Entrepreneurial spirit

Figure IV. 15 Perceptions of students from the fundamental field of study Social sciences *regarding the degree in which the faculty they attend contributes to the formation of certain skills and competences necessary at workplace*

*Figure IV.*16 features a compared image regarding the perceptions of teaching staff and students to the degree in which the faculty contributes to the formation of competences and skills needed at workplace. In addition, in the chart we represented also the satisfaction degree of employers to the degree in which the hired graduates demonstrated their skills and competences at workplace. In this context, we want to

point out two ideas. The first one refers to the perception lag between the students and the teaching staff: the teaching staff seems to overestimate the direct contribution of the faculty to the formation of skills and competences needed at workplace (the grades are higher than those given by students). The second idea refers to the fact that the scores given by employers (the latest empirical data collected in 2011) and the scores given by students are comparable as average value.



Q61. The capacity to argue persuasively a point of view.
Q62. The capacity to draw up in writing a concise and punctual argumentation.
Q64. Analytical thinking
Q66. Critical spirit
Q67. Creativity
Q68. The computer skill/modern technology skill
Q69. The skill of writing and speaking a foreign language
Q70. Team work capacity
Q71. Team leading capacity
Q73. Efficient organization capacity

Figure IV. 16 Degree in which certain competences and skills necessary at workplace are formed in the university study programmes.

Note. The average scores associated to employers represent their degree of satisfaction regarding the competences and skills noted in the higher education graduates they hired (the scores related to employers were collected in 2011).

Table IV. 24 Dynamics of perceptions of teaching staff regarding the degree in which the faculty where they teach form certain competences and skills needed at workplace

	2009	2010	2011	2015	Dynamics
Q61. Capacity to argue persuasively a point of view	4,5	4,1	4,1	4,0	↓ 0,5
Q62. Capacity to draw up in writing a concise and punctual argumentation	4,4	4,0	4,0	3,8	↓ 0,6
Q64. Analytical thinking	4,6	4,1	4,2	4,2	↓ 0,4
Q66. Critical spirit	4,3	4,0	3,9	3,9	↓ 0,4
Q67. Creativity	4,3	4,0	4,0	4,0	↓ 0,3
Q68. Computer skills/ modern technology skills	4,5	4,3	4,3	4,2	↓ 0,3
Q69. The skill of writing and speaking in a foreign language	4,0	3,9	3,9	3,7	↓ 0,3
Q70. Team work capacity	4,4	4,1	4,1	4,0	↓ 0,4
Q71. Team leading capacity	3,9	3,7	3,6	3,5	↓ 0,4
Q73. Efficient organization capacity	4,3	4,0	3,9	3,9	↓ 0,4
N74. Positive attitude to work	-	-	-	4,0	-
S11. Entrepreneurial spirit	-	-	-	3,3	-

Note. By "dynamics" we understand the variation of aggregate score in connection with the reference value represented by the year 2009. The scores represent average grades calculated to grades which varied between 1 and 5 (where 5 represent the maximum threshold).

Table IV.24 illustrates the way in which the perceptions of teaching staff varied in time regarding the degree in which the faculty where they teach contributes to the formation of certain competences and skills necessary at workplace. As you can see, the grades of teaching staff, on average, are on decrease compared to the reference values of the first measurement (made in 2009). This decrease varies between 0.3 and 0.5 points. By inspecting the way in which each item was evaluated during the four measurements, we must point out that in general, we can speak of a tendency of teaching staff to underestimate the degree in which the faculties of origin contribute to the formation of skills and competences investigated. Even if the descending dynamics of grades is sub-unitary, we can notice an evaluation trend on the decrease (e.g. none of the measurements after 2009 generated higher average scores, regardless of the item envisaged).

Table IV.25 illustrates the way in which the perceptions of students varied in time regarding the degree in which the faculty where they learn contributes to the formation of certain competences and skills needed at workplace. As you can see, the variation in time of the scores for each item is extremely low (it does not exceed 0.2). Unlike the tendency identified at teaching staff level, to evaluate on the decrease the different skills and competences subjected to analysis, in case of

students we can speak of a pronounced constancy at the level of perceptions regarding the usefulness of educational process in the formation of competences and skills needed at workplace.

Table IV. 25 Dynamics of perceptions of students regarding the degree in which the faculty where they teach trains competences and skills needed at workplace

	2009	2010	2011	2015
Q61. Capacity to argue persuasively a point of view	3,7	3,9	3,8	3,7
Q62. Capacity to draw up in writing a concise and punctual argumentation	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,8
Q64. Analytical thinking	3,9	4,0	3,9	4,0
Q66. Critical spirit	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,9
Q67. Creativity	3,8	3,8	3,8	3,6
Q68. Computer skills/ modern technology skills	3,7	3,8	3,7	3,9
Q69. The skill of writing and speaking in a foreign language	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,4
Q70. Team work capacity	3,8	3,9	3,8	3,7
Q71. Team leading capacity	3,6	3,6	3,6	3,5
Q73. Efficient organization capacity	3,9	3,9	3,8	3,9
N74. Positive attitude to work	-	-	-	3,7
S11. Entrepreneurial spirit	-	-	-	3,4

Note. The scores represent means calculated to grades which varied between 1 and 5 (where 5 represent the maximum threshold).

Students embrace highly positive perceptions regarding the usefulness of university studies not only from the perspective of training the skills and competences needed at workplace, but also from the perspective of general finalities of education. For example, over 70% of students think that the educational offer satisfies their professional development aspirations and over 80% think that it increases their chances of having a higher income. The data is comparable with measurements made in other times from the past (*Table IV.26*).

Table IV. 26 Dynamics of students' opinions regarding the usefulness of the faculty

	2010	2011	2015
NQ13a. The educational offer of the faculty satisfies my personal development aspirations	74 %	68 %	72 %
NQ14a. The university studies increase my chances of having a higher income	83 %	80 %	82 %

Note. The values represent the aggregation of scores related to students who said that they agree"to a large extent" and"To a very large extent" with the statements mentioned.

As for the dimension of student mobility, the perception regarding the usefulness of internships in other universities is influenced by the educational history of the

students. For example, in *Table IV.27*, we can see that over half of the students who benefited from mobility internships (51%) think that they are useful to *a very large extent.* Even if the idea of an internship in another university is perceived by the students positive in general (see the columns *to a large extent* and *to a very large extent*), the weight of those who are extremely favourable to this idea is higher in the category of beneficiaries of mobility internships.

Table IV. 27 Perception of students regarding the usefulness of internships in other universities

		Not at all	To a very small extent	To a small extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent
Students who benefited from mobility internships for at least one month during university	No	3,8%	5,2%	16,5%	44,6%	29,8%
	Yes	2,2%	4,4%	8,9%	33,3%	51,1%
Total		3,5%	5,1%	15,2%	42,6%	33,6%

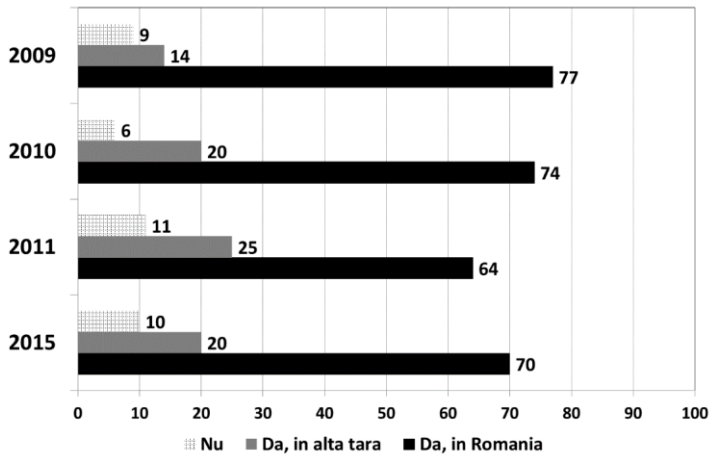
Note. Table IV.27 Illustrates the distribution of answers to the question: To what extent do you think that it is useful that the students spend mobility studies in other universities? The distribution of the answers is done by two categories of students (who benefited from mobility internships and who did not benefit from mobility internships).

4.4.4 Professional career

As for the future projections of professional training of students by participation in university programmes, Figures IV17-IV.19 illustrate the dynamics of perceptions across four moments in time. You can see that the preferences for continuation of studies with enrolment in master's programmes are kept in 2015 at a comparative level to the past years. For example, the dominant preference is to attend a master's degree programme in Romania (70%). The doctoral studies seem to have become attractive lately; 63% of respondents claim that they are interested in continuation of studies by enrolment in a doctor's degree programme. The score for 2015 is the highest, in relation to the scores obtained during the four measurements made. It is interesting that the percentage of those who declared that they did not intent to attend doctoral studies decreased by almost 10% by taking as reference the value recorded in 2009.

Another interesting aspect refers to the option for doubling the educational route at bachelor's degree. The weight of those willing to attend a bachelor's degree programme decreased by 10% compared to the numbers of 2009; thus, only 18% of students take into account getting the second bachelor's degree (this is the lowest value recorded across the four measurements).

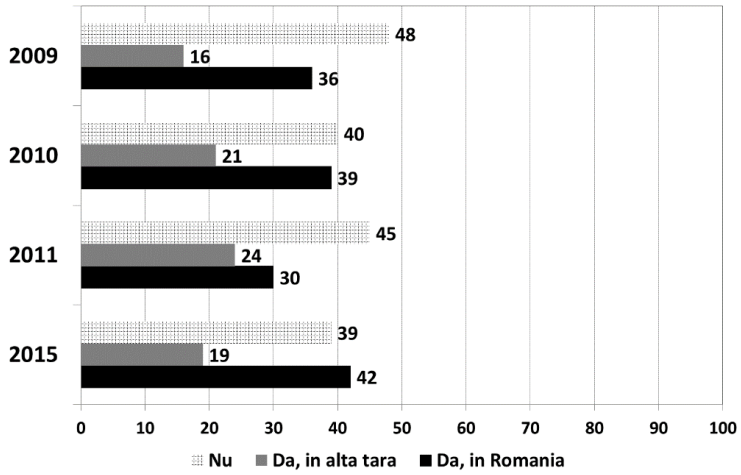
As for migration to studies abroad, the numbers reported for 2015 show rather a decrease of intention, if we relate to 2011 (when the last measurement took place). For example, the intention of attending a master's degree or a doctor's degree abroad decreased by 5%, and the weight of those interested in a bachelor's degree abroad (other than the degree they finished/to which they are enrolled) reached only 5%.



No. Yes, in another country Yes, in Romania

Figure IV. 17 Intention of students to continue their studies with a master's degree programme

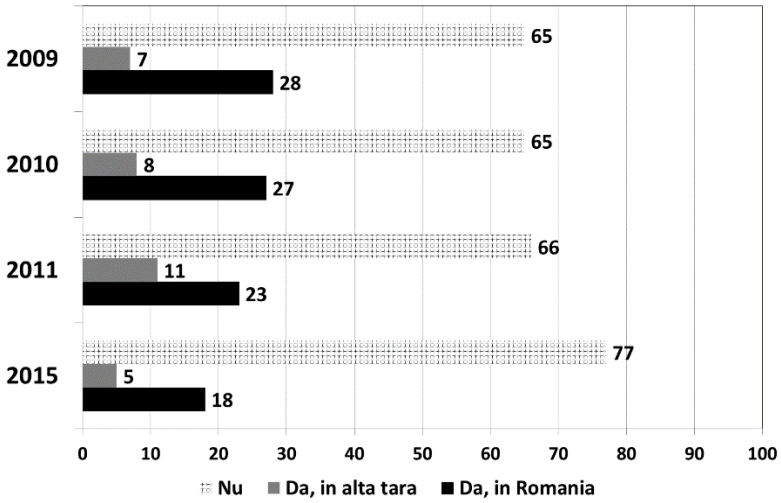
Note. The scores represent relative frequencies (%)



No. Yes, in another country Yes, in Romania

Figure IV. 18 Intention of students to continue their studies with a doctor's degree programme

Note. The scores represent relative frequencies (%)



No. Yes, in another country Yes, in Romania

Figure IV. 19 Intention of students to continue their studies with another bachelor's degree programme

Note. The scores represent relative frequencies (%)

Table IV.28 Projections of students regarding the continuation of studies with a master's degree, distributed by fundamental fields of study

Fundamental field	In the next years, do you intend to attend a master's degree programme?		
	No	Yes, in another country	Yes, in Romania
Mathematics and nature sciences	14%	5%	81%
Engineering sciences	5%	22%	74%
Biological and biomedical sciences	23%	24%	54%
Social sciences	7%	19%	74%
Humanities and arts	12%	19%	69%

Table IV.29 Projections of students regarding the continuation of studies with a doctor's degree, distributed by fundamental fields of study

Fundamental field	In the next years, do you intend to attend a doctor's degree programme?		
	No	Yes, in another country	Yes, in Romania
Mathematics and nature sciences	53%	11%	37%
Engineering sciences	53%	15%	32%
Biological and biomedical	25%	35%	40%

	sciences			
	Social sciences	36%	18%	46%
	Humanities and arts	31%	17%	52%

Table IV.30 Projections of students regarding the continuation of studies by enrolment in another bachelor's degree programme, distributed by fields

Fundamental field	In the next years, do you plan to attend another bachelor's degree programme?		
	No	Yes, in another country	Yes, in Romania
Mathematics and nature sciences	85%		15%
Engineering sciences	77%	2%	22%
Biological and biomedical sciences	85%	5%	10%
Social sciences	77%	7%	16%
Humanities and arts	60%	7%	33%

Tables IV.28 -IV.30 feature an overview of the projections for continuation of education depending on the fundamental fields of study. We can see that the largest weight of students interested in studies abroad is in the field *biological and biomedical sciences* (24%, respectively 35% plan to attend a master's degree/Ph.D. degree abroad). The doctoral studies do not seem to be too attractive for the students in the fields *engineering sciences, mathematics and nature sciences*, where 53% declare that they do not intend to attend a doctoral study programme. As for the availability to practise their profession abroad, most of those who declared that they intended to do this *to a large and very large extent* come from the fields *engineering sciences* and *medical and biomedical sciences* (48%, respectively 49%; see *Table IV.31*). It is interesting that from all the categories of students, the fewest who declared that they planned to get experience abroad and then to return to Romania are from the field *medical and biomedical sciences* (see *Table IV.32*).

Table IV.31 Intention to practise their profession in another country

Fundamental field	In the next years, do you plan to practise your profession in another country?				
	Not at all	To a very small extent	To a small extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent
Mathematics and nature sciences	19%	21%	33%	19%	7%
Engineering sciences	15%	13%	25%	24%	24%

	Biological and biomedical sciences	16%	12%	24%	25%	24%
	Social sciences	23%	20%	21%	19%	16%
	Humanities and arts	22%	13%	27%	19%	19%

Table IV.32 Intention to return to the country after a certain time abroad

Fundamental field		In the next years, do you intend to get work experience in other countries, and then to come back to Romania?				
		Not at all	To a very small extent	To a small extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent
	Mathematics and nature sciences	24%	5%	32%	27%	12%
	Engineering sciences	19%	20%	25%	23%	14%
	Biological and biomedical sciences	26%	20%	25%	10%	18%
	Social sciences	25%	19%	19%	18%	18%
	Humanities and arts	26%	10%	23%	21%	20%

In the context of presentation of intentions regarding the continuation of studies or the practise of profession abroad, we think that we should make short references to the degree of optimism which the students have regarding the possibilities they have to work in the field (*Table IV.33*).

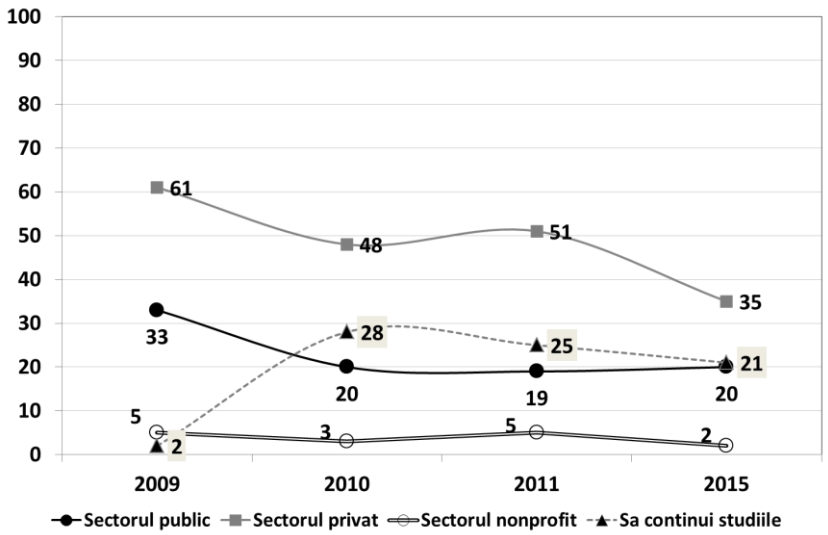
Table IV.33 Degree of optimism of students regarding the chances of practising the profession in the field

		Do you think that in the future you will practise in the specialization you currently attend?				
		Not at all	To a very small extent	To a small extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent
Fundamental field	Mathematics and nature sciences	2%	2%	21%	43%	31%
	Engineering sciences	2%	4%	14%	34%	45%
	Biological and biomedical sciences	2%	3%	6%	24%	65%
	Social sciences	2%	8%	16%	34%	40%
	Humanities and arts	2%	4%	15%	39%	40%

The most optimistic students regarding the chances of working in the specialization in which they train are from the field of *biological and biomedical sciences* (65%), and the most pessimistic are from the field of *social sciences* (25%). As for the favourite sector of activity, most of the students which belong to the field of *humanities and arts* would prefer to work in the public sector (31%), while the students from the field of *engineering sciences* and from the field of *biological and biomedical sciences* would prefer the private sector (49%, respectively 41%). As you can see in Table IV.34, the non-profit sector is preferred as employment destination by an extremely low number of students; the weight varies from a field of study to another between 0% and 4%.

Table IV. 34 Type of preferred activity sector for employment

Fundamental field	After the completion of studies you currently attend would you like to work in ...?				
	Public sector	Private sector	NGOs	Own business	Continue studies
Mathematics and nature sciences	27%	30%	-	27%	16%
Engineering sciences	12%	49%	1%	21%	18%
Biological and biomedical sciences	16%	41%	-	20%	23%
Social sciences	24%	27%	4%	23%	22%
Humanities and arts	31%	15%	4%	14%	36%



Public sector Private sector Non-profit sector Continue studies

Figure IV. 20 Dynamics of students' preferences for the sector in which they want to work

The private sector remains the first option in the hierarchy of students' preferences for destinations of jobs (*Figure IV.*20). Yet, we have to point out that if in 2009 the private sector had 61% of preferences, in 2015 this score reached 35%. On the other hand, preferences for work in the public sector seem to be constant around 20%, at least in the last five years.

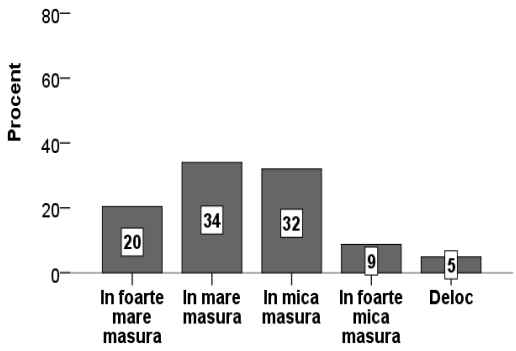
4.5 Perceptions on policies and quality of Romanian higher education at system level. Descriptive statistics – data from online sociological surveys

4.5.1 Perceptions of teaching staff

4.5.1.1 Educational process

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

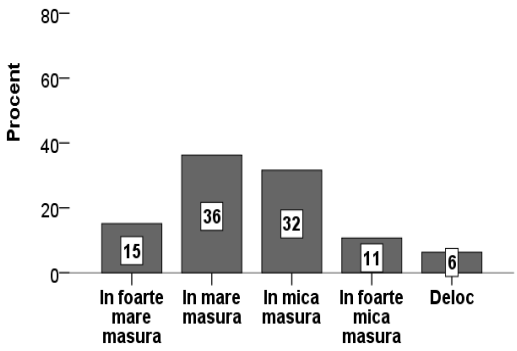
From one year to another the generations you work with are more and more poorly prepared from academic point of view



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q5.1

From one year to another the generations you work with are less willing to learn by the methods you were used to



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q5.2

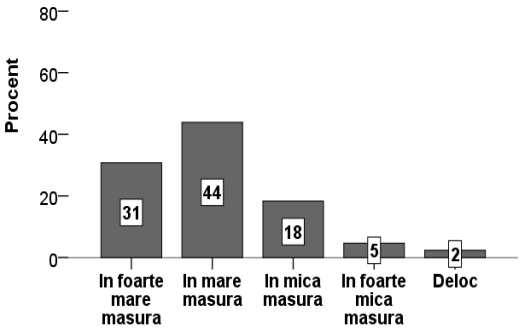
The opinion of teaching staff regarding the academic training level of the students they work with varies. About 34% of respondents agree to a large extent with the statement according to which the new generation is more and

The extent to which the new generations are willing to learn by the "traditional" methods to which the teaching staff was used is relatively reduced. Thus, we notice a change in the teaching-learning methods. The number of teaching staff

more poorly prepared from academic point of view, while 20% agree to a very large extent with this statement.

who claim that they agree “to a very large extent” with the fact that the new generations are less and less willing to learn by the models previously used is about 15%. We notice that about 36% of teaching staff claim that they agree “to a large extent” with this new tendency of giving up the methods they were used to.

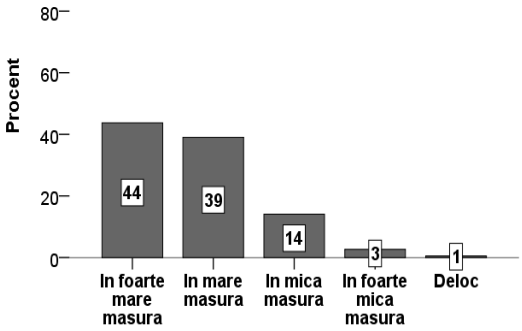
From year to year the generations you work with are more and more different as motivations, values and expectations



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q5.3

From year to year the teaching staff have to apply new teaching methods and motivations of students in the learning



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

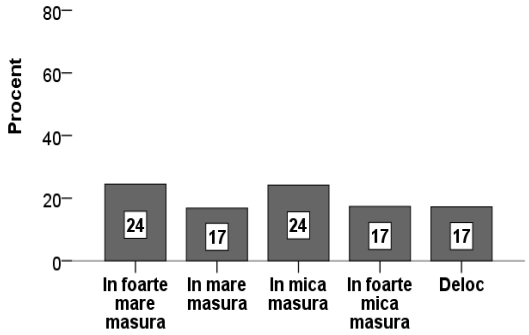
Q5.4

The change is felt at the level of motivation, the values and expectations by which the new generations guide them. Thus, the percentage of teaching staff who claim that the generations they work with are different as motivation, values and expectations is 75% (among whom 31% agree to a very large extent with this statement, while 44% agree to a large extent).

Motivation in the learning process is essential and the teaching staff has to find and apply new methods of motivating the students. 44% of respondents declare that they agree “to a very large extent” with the application of new motivational methods which come to support the values and expectations of the new generations of students.

Q5. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

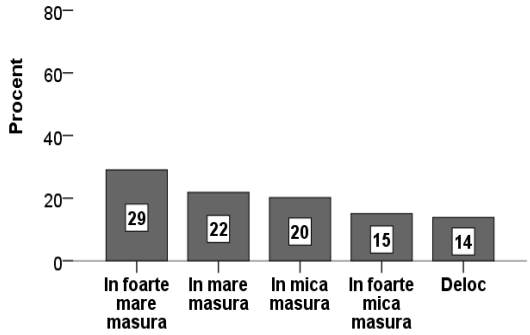
The series of students from the course are too numerous to have quality in the teaching act



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q5.5

The groups of students from the seminar are too numerous to work and evaluate at a high quality level



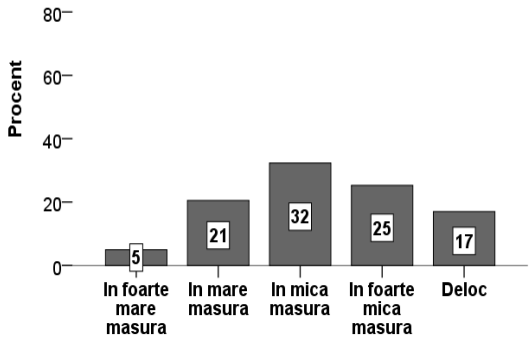
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q5.6

As for the number of students who participate in courses, their number is seen as too numerous by 41% of teaching staff who participated in this research who think that it can influence quality regarding teaching. But, approximately 34% of respondents think that there is no correlation between the large number of students and the poor quality of teaching act.

The too high number of students in the seminar can affect the quality of teaching-evaluation process. About 51% of teaching staff agree with this statement, claiming that if the seminar groups are too numerous there may be difficulties in working with and evaluating the students at a high quality level.

In the relationship with students, the professors have to limit strictly to the contents of subjects they teach to students

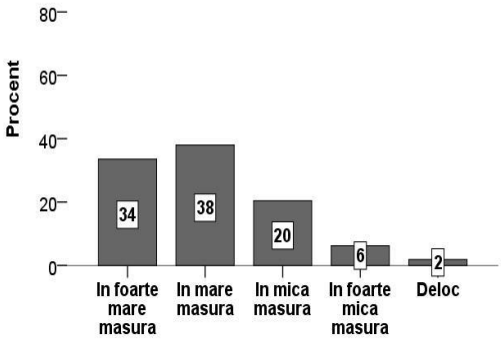


To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q5.7

The strict limitation to the content of the subject they teach is appreciated by 26% of the teaching staff interviewed (among whom 5% relate very closely to this idea, while 21% declare that they agree to a large extent with it). About 42% of the teaching staff does not agree with the strict relation based on transmission of information from the field of study, among which about 17% are totally against this type of professor-student relation.

In the relationship with the students, it is preferable that professors offer advice in professional and personal life

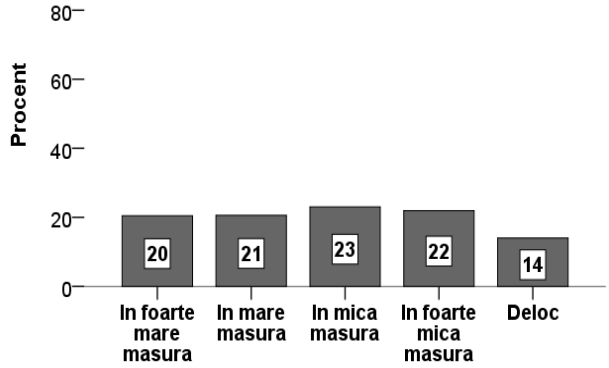


To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q5.8

The creation of an open relationship between the professor and the student, relationship which allows getting advice on professional and personal life is regarded as a positive aspect by 72% of the teaching staff in university.

The seminar/laboratory rooms do not have the technical equipment necessary for quality in the carrying out of the activity



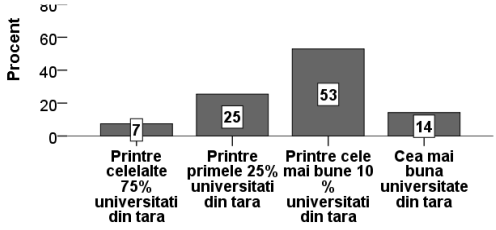
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q5.9

As for the technical equipment necessary for the carrying out of teaching activities the answers received vary. Half of the teaching staff declares themselves satisfied with the current conditions, while the other half shows that the seminar or laboratory rooms do not have the technical equipment necessary to carry out adequate didactic activities.

4.5.1.2 Global assessment

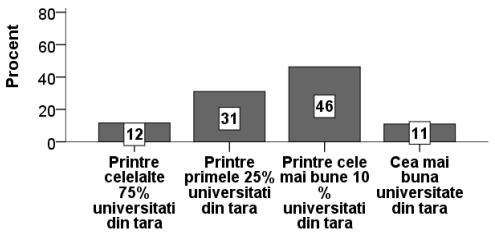
In your opinion the university where you work and to which you are affiliated is from the point of view of quality of activities



Among the other 75% universities of the country
Among the first 25% universities of the country
Among the best 10 % universities of the country
The best university of the country

NQ20a

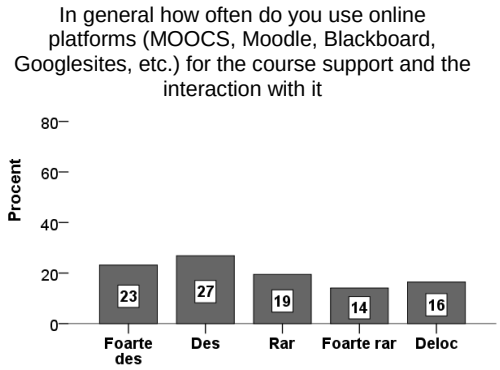
In your opinion, the university where you work and to which you are affiliated is from the point of view of quality of research activities

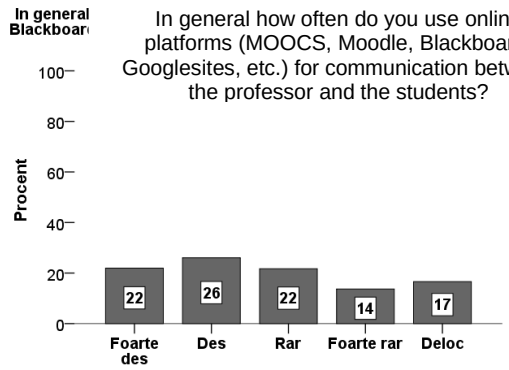


Among the other 75% universities of the country
Among the first 25% universities of the country
Among the best 10 % universities of the country
The best university of the country

NQ20b

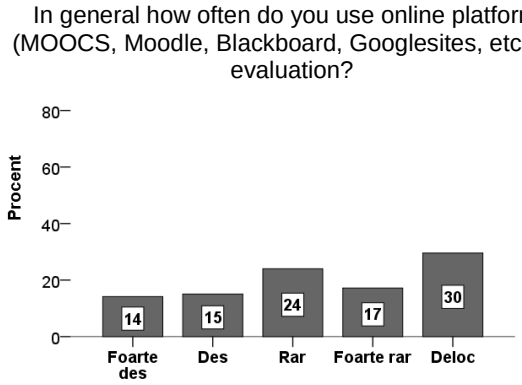
The teaching staff in university thinks that the university where they work is among the first 10% of the country regarding the quality of teaching activities in proportion of 53%, while the same teaching staff thinks in a lower proportion (46%) that the universities to which they are affiliated are among the first 10% regarding the research activity. These results can be explained by the results of classification of universities in Romania (90 participating universities) made in 2011 by EUA (European Association of Universities) from which it results that a higher number of universities were classified as education-oriented universities (48), while only 12 were classified as having the main mission research (universities of advanced research and education)[91]. Also a substantial percentage of respondents think that the university where they work is the best in the country regarding the teaching activity (14%) and 10% regarding the research activity.





Very often *Often* *Seldom* *Very rarely* *Not at all*

NQ01.a NQ01.b.



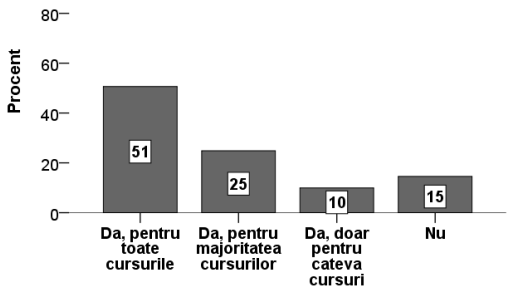
Very often *Often* *Seldom* *Very rarely* *Not at all*

NQ01.c.

[91] *Order of Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sports no. 5262/2011 on observance of results of classification of universities*

The teaching staff in university claims that they use often and very often online platforms (*MOOCS, Moodle, Blackboard, Google sites etc.)* for the course support and the interaction with it (50%-NQ01.a) and for the communication between the professor and the student (48%). However, respondents claim in much lower proportion that they use these platforms often and very often for evaluation (29%) and 30% of teaching staff in university claim that they do not use these platforms at all for evaluation. Thus, the most frequently used functions of these online platforms in the university environment are limited to course management (space for distribution of course support, bibliographical materials, supplementary resources etc.) and management of communication with the students and less used are the functions dedicated to examination processes, the management of tasks (works) allotted in a course or collaborative instruction. A possible explanation for these results can be the lack of confidence in the use of these platforms for evaluation of students, taking into account the stakes of these results, but also because of reduced competences in design and elaboration of online evaluation instruments, which implies a more complex process than the course management and communication with the students.

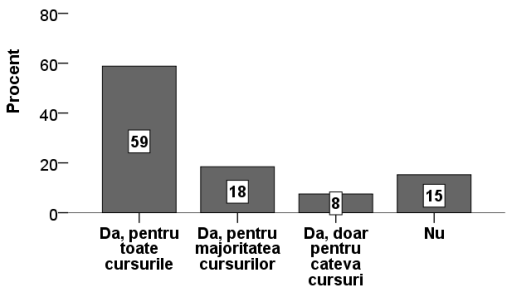
Do you ask the students to evaluate your courses?



Yes, for all courses
Yes, for most courses
Yes, only for a few courses
No

Q21

In your department, is it compulsory that the students evaluate your courses?

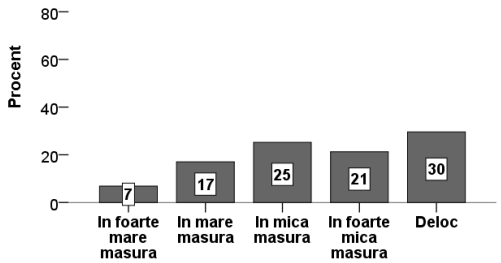


Yes, for all courses
Yes, for most courses
Yes, only for a few courses
No

Q22

As for the obligation of evaluation of courses by the students, 59 % of the teaching staff in university answered that in their department this obligation exists for all the courses, while only 51% answered that they ask their students to evaluate all their courses. The discrepancy is not very high taking into account that 25% of them answered that they ask their students to evaluate most of their courses.

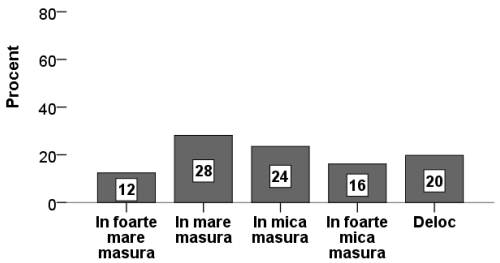
In your faculty/department, the evaluations made by the students to the courses are used for decisions of entrusting courses to professors?



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q23a

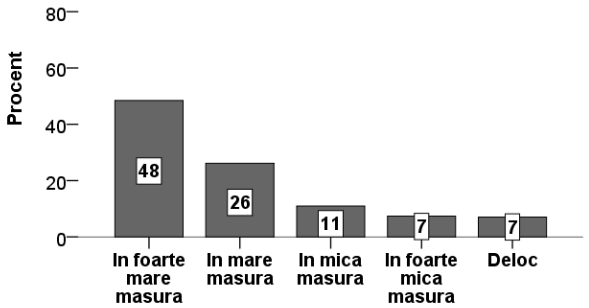
In your faculty/department the evaluations made by students to courses are used for discussions and decisions of drawing up the curriculum?



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q23b

In your faculty/department, the evaluations made by students to courses are used for annual evaluation of teaching staff?



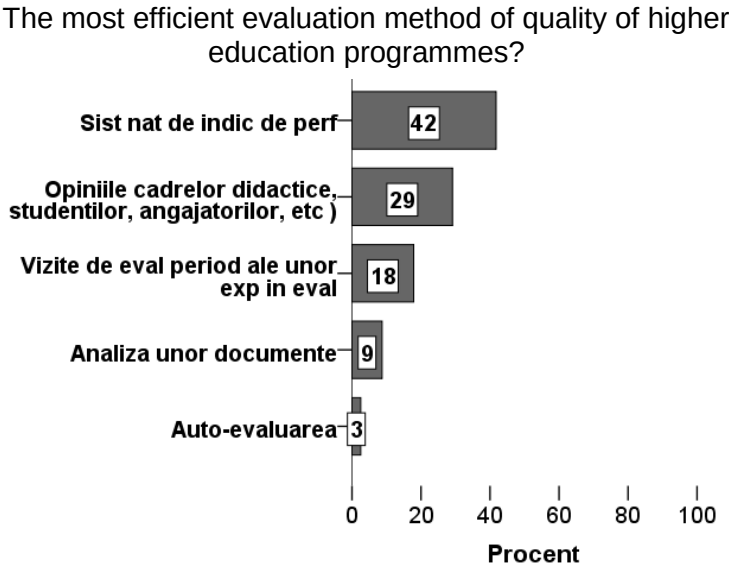
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q23c

The main use of the evaluation of courses by the students was identified by 74% of respondents as to a large and very large extent the annual evaluation of teaching staff. The use of courses' evaluation by students to generate discussions and decisions of drawing up the curriculum was selected by 40% of respondents as used to a large and very large extent and only 24% had the same answer regarding the use of this evaluation for making decisions of entrusting the courses to professors. Paradoxically, we can see that although the role of courses evaluation by students is

"hierarchization" of teaching staff by granting scores according to the results of this evaluation, these results are not used to substantiate some human resource management decisions at department level, but rather to operate changes in the course curriculum. Another aspect which can be considered in subsequent research is the use of results of courses' evaluation by students at individual level, at the level of each teaching staff member and the way in which the teaching staff relate to this evaluation.

4.5.1.3 Accreditation and quality assurance



National system of performance indicators
Opinions of teaching staff, students, employers etc.)
Regular evaluation visits of experts in evaluation
Analysis of documents
Self-evaluation

NQ80

The teaching staff interviewed from university thought in proportion of 42% that the most efficient evaluation method of quality of study programmes from higher education was represented by the evaluation based on a national system of performance indicators reported by universities, being following in the preferences of respondents with about 29% by the evaluation based on the opinions of those involved in university life (teaching staff, students, employers etc.). and the evaluation based on the analysis of documents (9%). Thus, we can see the preference of respondents for the existence of a standardized evaluation and reporting system made by universities and consider less efficient the evaluations made by the regular

evaluation visits of experts in evaluation (18%). Paradoxically, although they think as an effective evaluation method the consultation of actors involved and the reporting by universities without external interventions, the respondents rate on the last place the self-evaluation as efficient method for evaluation of quality of study programmes, even if the self-evaluation of quality has as purpose[92] the appreciation of own results and performance independently and to identify the fields in which they can correct or improve their performance.

How important do you think is the following criteria to evaluate the universities of Romania?

In this item the respondents evaluated on a scale from 1 to 10 each criterion (*where 1 represents not at all important" and 10 – "maximal importance")* the importance of a set of 12 evaluation criteria. In the *Table IV.* below we tried to group these criteria depending on the scores given by respondents. We must mention that all the 12 criteria got scores over 5, which means that it is all considered important, but to different extents.

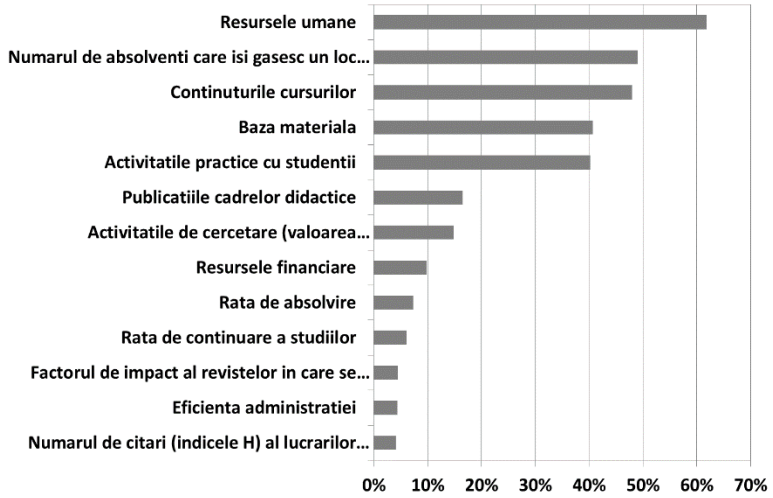
Maximal importance (8-10)	Moderate importance (6-8)	Less important (<6)
Publications of teaching staff	In the field of arts, architecture, sports: works, published works, concerts, exhibitions, performances homologated in sport etc.	Patents and registered patents
Equipment of university	Services provided to students (professional guidance, hostels etc.)	Attraction of research grants
Programmes developed in collaboration with private employers	Varied offer of optional courses	Non-academic contracts (addressed to the market)
Integration of graduates on labour market	Students/teaching staff ratio	Attraction of foreign students

The evaluation criteria considered the most important for university teaching staff refers to: scientific competences of teaching staff, connection with labour market and the material resources of universities. Although they give a great importance to the development of programmes developed in collaboration with private employers, the respondents do not pay so great importance to the realization of non-academic contracts (addressed to the market). This result makes us observe that although the university teaching staff thinks as very important the integration of graduates on the

[92] http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Proceduri/Metodologie_de_evaluare_externa.pdf

labour market, the connection they see as opportune is only regarding academic collaboration.

In your opinion, what would be the most important criteria for evaluation of quality of a university programme? (*the respondents were asked to mention maximum three criteria of the list*)



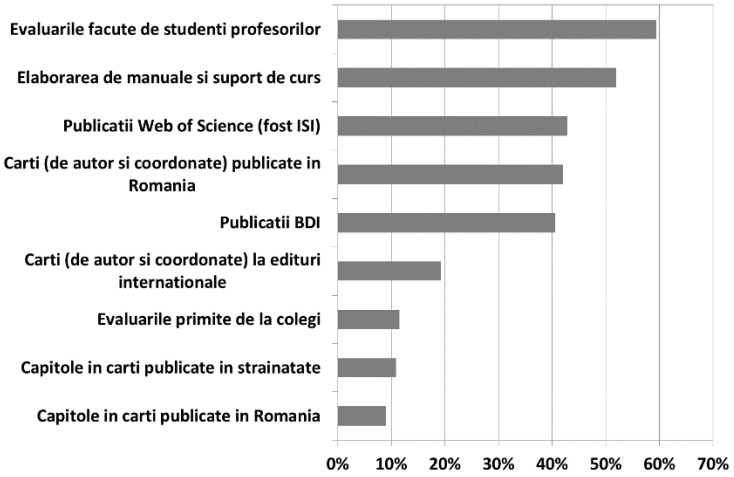
Human resources
Number of graduates who find a job…
Contents of courses
Material base
Practical activities with students
Publications of teaching staff
Research activities (value…
Financial resources
Graduation rate
Studies continuation rate
Impact factor of magazines in which
Efficiency of administration
Number of quotations (H index) of works

NQ86 – NQ98

As for the evaluation of quality of a university programme, with over 60% of answers, the university teaching staff thought as very important the criteria in connection with human resources. On the second place in the hierarchy of respondents they mentioned the number of graduates who find a job, aspect which comes first among the criteria for evaluation of universities. On the next places we find issues related to the contents of courses and types of activities from courses.

In your opinion, which should be the most important criteria for evaluation of teaching staff? (*the respondents were asked to mention maximum three criteria of*

the list)



Evaluations made by students to professors
Elaboration of textbooks and course support
Web of Science publications (former ISI)
Books (of author and coordinated) published in Romania
BDI publications
Books (of author and coordinated) in international publishing houses
Evaluations received from colleagues
Chapters in books published abroad
Chapters in books published in Romania

UQ02

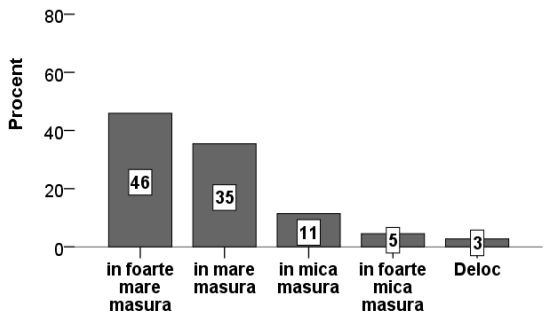
On the first two places with a proportion of over 50%, the respondents think that for evaluation of teaching staff the most important issues are connected with academic activity (elaboration of textbooks and course supports, evaluations of students), paying less importance to publications (ISI articles, books, chapters in books published in Romania or abroad). Paradoxically, the university teaching staff chose as the most important criterion in evaluation of universities, the publications of teaching staff, which makes us notice an inconsistency between the different evaluation levels (institutional and individual).

With reference to financial issues, the teaching staff thinks to a large and very large extent that the financing of universities should be done according to performances (91%). As for the degree of satisfaction in connection with the income obtained from research activity and from the income earned from teaching activity is satisfactory, the teaching staff answered in proportion of 53% that they are satisfied to small and very small extent with these incomes and 61% mentioned that they are not satisfied at all with the financial support the university offers for the purpose of participating in conferences and scientific events.

In the vision of university teaching staff, the mission of universities is the teaching (to large and very large extent 79%), more than the research (to small and very small extent 61%). This result is consistent with the item UQ01 where the teaching staff considered that a less important evaluation criterion of universities is the attraction of research grants.

As for the evaluation of teaching staff, the respondents think to a large and very large extent (87%) that they should be regularly evaluated.

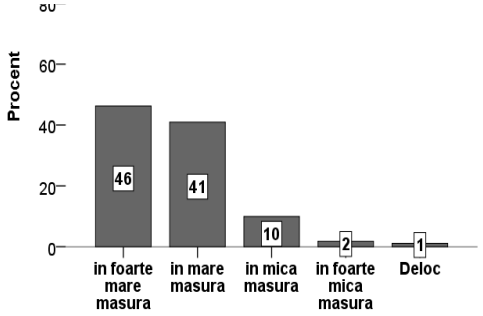
The financing of universities should be done in differentiated way according to performances



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ10

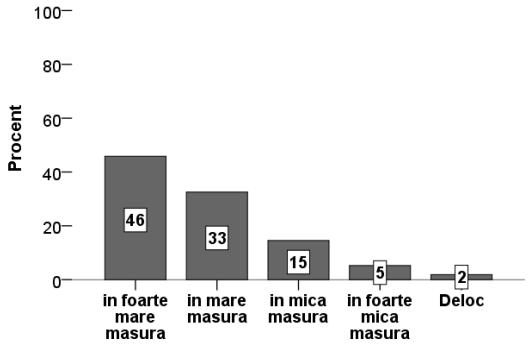
The teaching staff should be regularly evaluated.



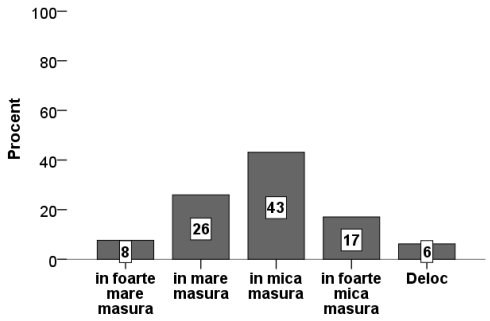
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ12

Research is important, but the true vocation of the university is teaching.



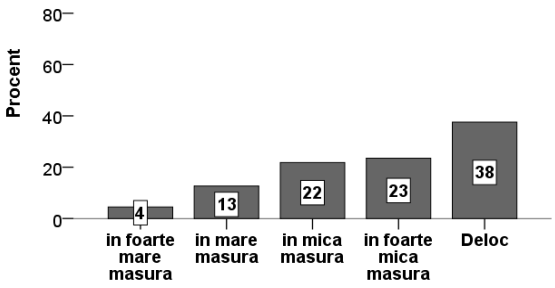
Teaching is important, but the true vocation of the university is research.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ14

I am satisfied with the financial support the university offers for the participation in conferences and scientific events.



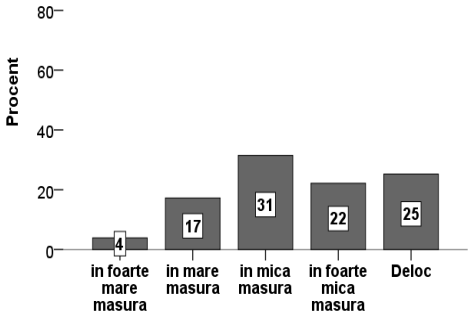
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

CD1

To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ15

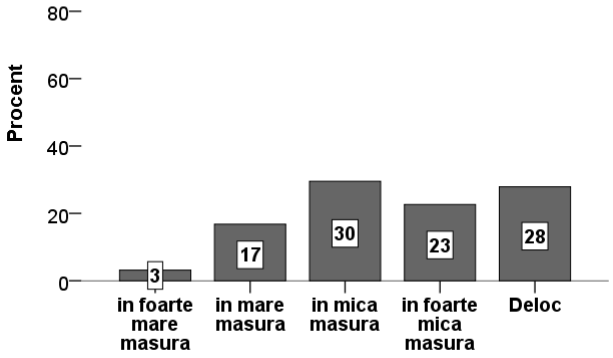
The income earned in teaching activity is satisfactory.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

CD2

The income earned in research activity is satisfactory.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

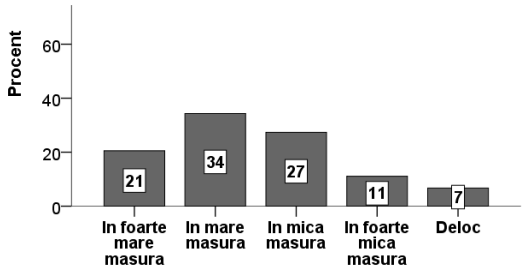
CD3

4.5.2 Perceptions of students

4.5.2.1 Aspects regarding the educational process

Perceptions regarding the training obtained during the high school studies

The high school I graduated offered me all the necessary knowledge to understand what is taught in faculty.

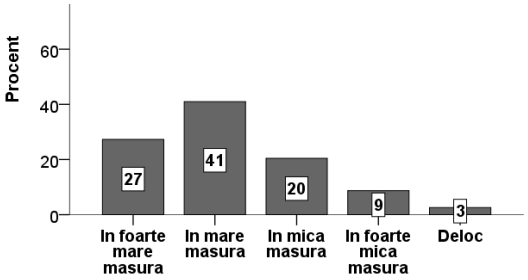


To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ95

The satisfaction level regarding the level of knowledge acquired in high school, the knowledge necessary to understand what is taught in faculty is considered by 56% of students as high. But a proportion of 18% of students think that this knowledge acquired in high school is not useful to adjust to the particularity of teaching at university level.

In high school I acquired skills and competences which allowed me to become a good student.

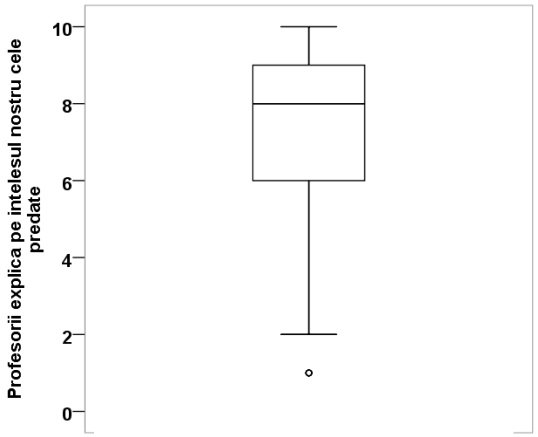


To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

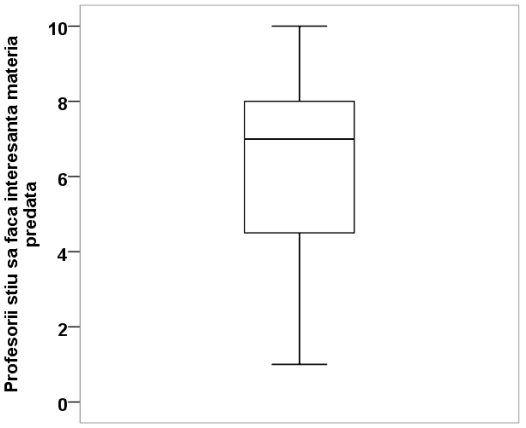
UQ96

As for the skills and competences which are defining for becoming a good student, 68% of the students' participants in this study show that the high school studies helped them develop these skills and competences.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements...



Q23 The professors explain the subject taught to our understanding.

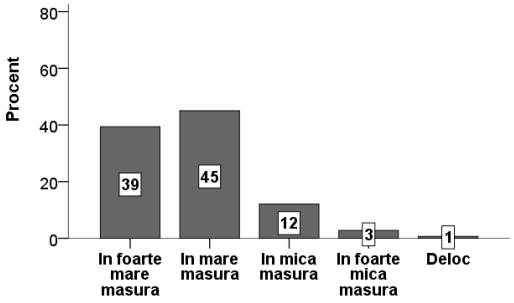


Q24 The professors know how to make the subject taught interesting.

As for the accessibility level of thematic contents debated in course and seminar activities they are often regarded as accessible to students. As for the motivation of students and stirring curiosity about the subject taught, the students declare that they are satisfied with the didactic strategy chosen by the teaching staff.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements...

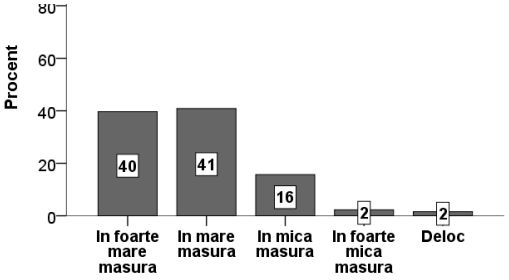
The specialization attended is of high social prestige.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ51

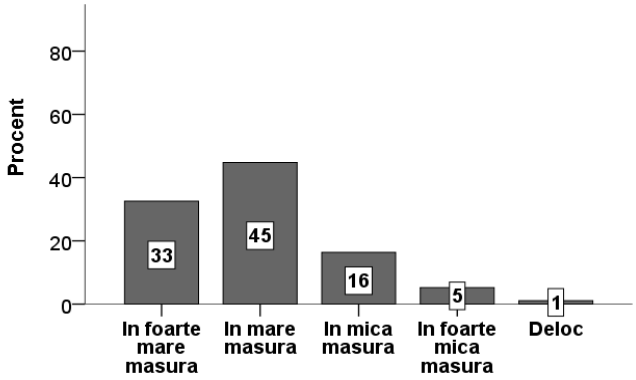
Among other similar faculties from the country, the faculty I attent has a high social prestige.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ52

The professions of graduates of this specialization have a high social prestige.



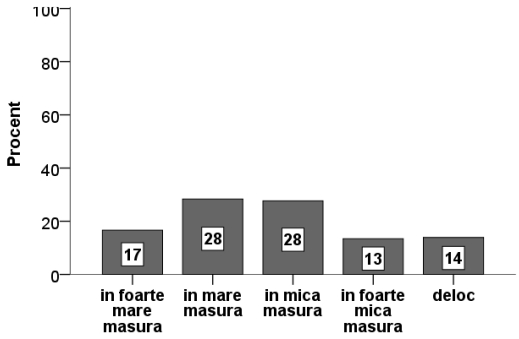
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ53

The vision of students regarding the high prestige the specialization and faculty they attend enjoys at social level is quoted as an important criterion in the selection regarding higher education. The prestige of graduates' professions represents another criterion which enjoys high interest among students.

In your preparation for courses, to what extent do you use the following sources of information?

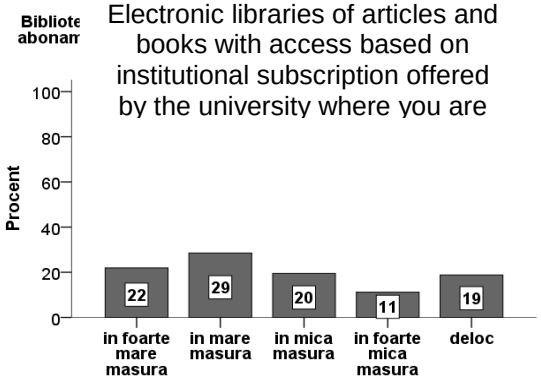
Classical libraries, with reading rooms?



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

NQ04a

Electronic libraries of articles and books with access based on institutional subscription offered by the university where you are

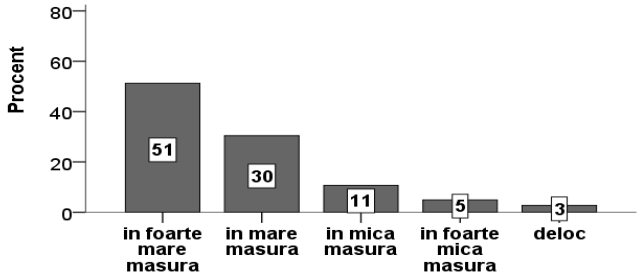


To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

NQ04b

In your preparation for courses, to what extent do you use the following sources of information?

Websites, encyclopaedias or other types of online resources available for free (for example, Wikipedia, bookfi, etc.)



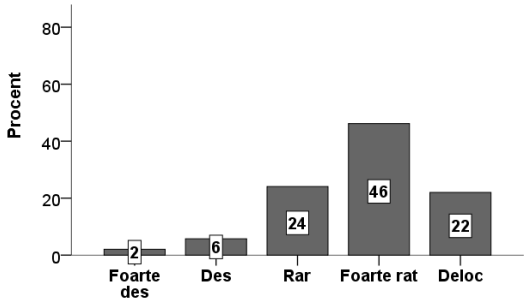
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

NQ04c

In their preparation for courses, the students declare that they recourse to reading room made available by the universities and to the electronic libraries of articles and books with access based on institutional subscription offered by the university to which they are enrolled. But the most popular sources of information among students are websites, encyclopaedias or other types of online resources available for free, such as Wikipedia or bookfi.

Please specify ...

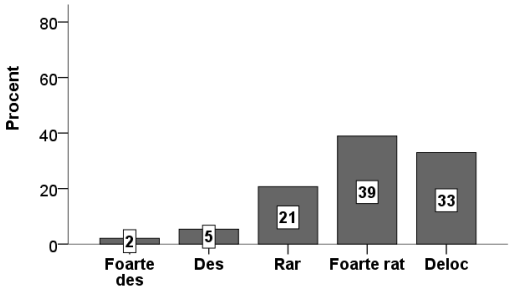
How often does it happen that professors are absent from a course?



Very often
Often
Seldom
Very rarely
Not at all

Q39a

How often does it happen that professors send assistant professors to give the lectures?



Very often
Often
Seldom
Very rarely
Not at all

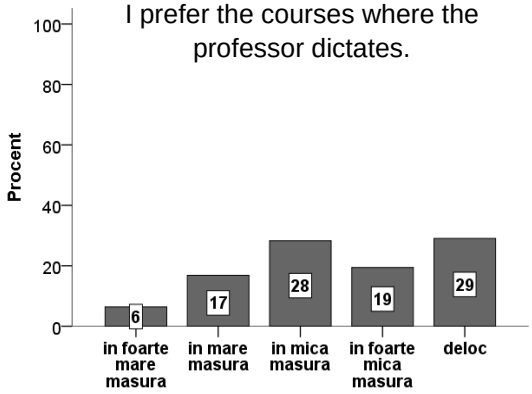
Q39b

The frequency by which the professors are absent from a course is relatively reduced. A majority of about 68% of students declare that these situations are very

rarely encountered or they never assisted to a case when a professor was absent from a course. As for the frequency by which the professors are replaced in course by assistants is rarely encountered or very rarely encountered. A proportion of 33% of students declare that they never encountered the situation when the teaching staff is replaced at the course by assistant professors.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

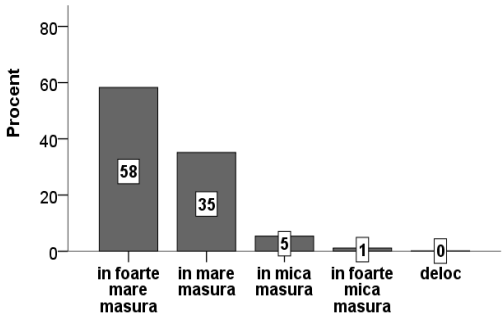
I prefer the courses where the professor dictates.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ90a

I prefer the courses where the professor always has a dialogue with students.



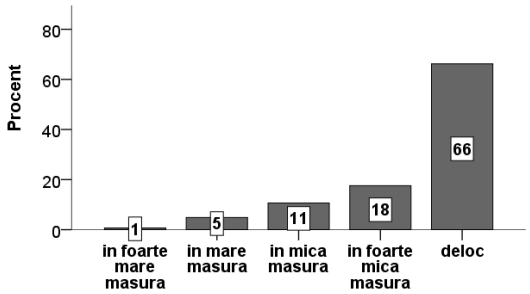
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ90b

The student – professor interactivity is an important factor so that about 93% of students declare in favour of participation in courses where the professor always has a dialogue with students. Moreover, the number of students who prefer to assist to courses where the professor dictates is reduced, about 6%, while 38% of students appreciate this teaching style to a very small extent or not at all.

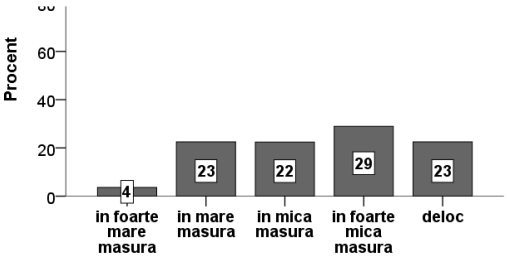
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Is it acceptable to take a full report from referate.ro, Wikipedia or other similar websites to do/make the works/reports required at courses or seminars?



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent

Is it acceptable to adjust the content of a report taken from websites which offer such materials to do/make the works/reports required at courses or seminars?

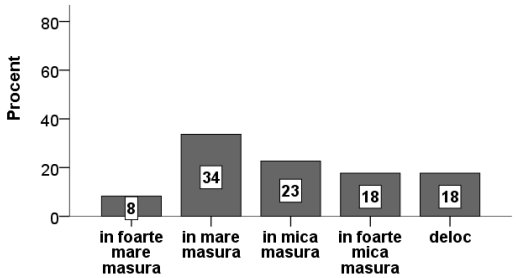


To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent

To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ91a1

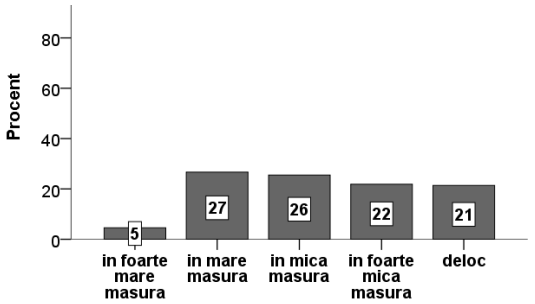
Is it acceptable to take pages from the course support or other works of the professor to do/make the works/reports required at courses or seminars?



To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ91a2

Is it acceptable to take pages from an older work to do/make the works/reports required at courses or seminars?



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ91b

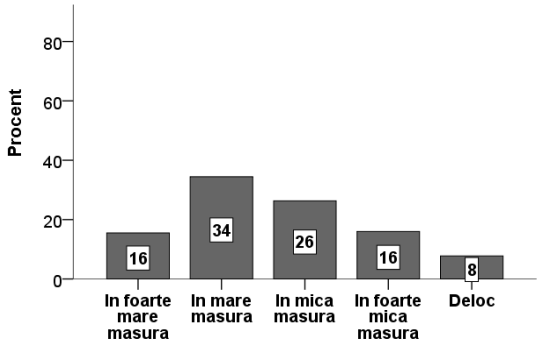
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

UQ91c

The tolerance of students regarding plagiarism is extremely reduced. Thus, the students participant in this investigation based on questionnaire believe that it is not ethical to take a report in full from referate.ro, Wikipedia or other similar websites for the realization of the works/reports required at courses or seminars.
About 25% of respondents agree with the adjustment of the content of a report taken from websites which provide such materials and taking information from the course support or other works of the professor.

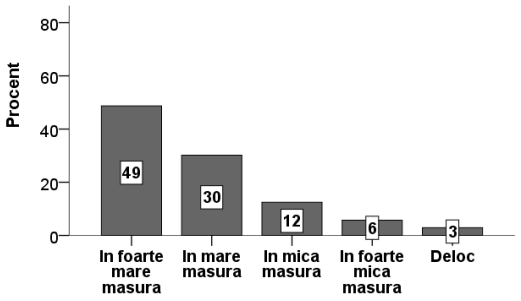
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

The University offers a wide range of internships.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent

The internships are a real benefit for my training.

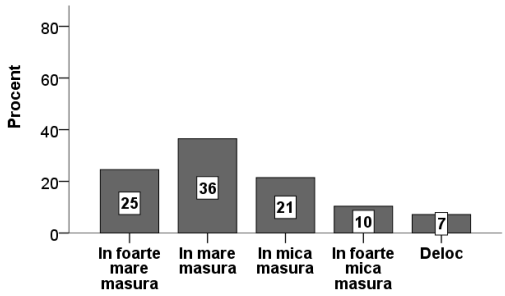


To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent

To a very small extent
Not at all

S9

I do not think that I will have difficulties in finding a job after graduation



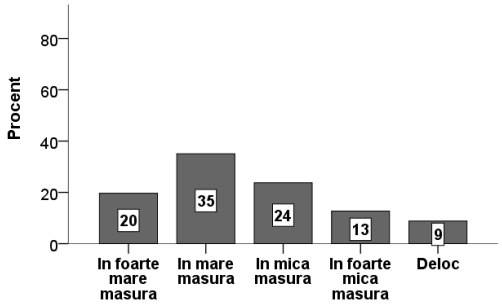
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

op10

To a very small extent
Not at all

Q51

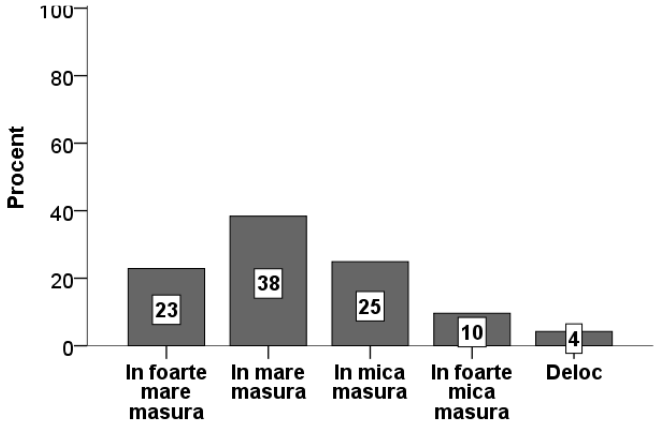
I do not think that I will have difficulties in finding the job I want after graduation.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

op11

During the university I get the skills and competences I will need at workplace.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

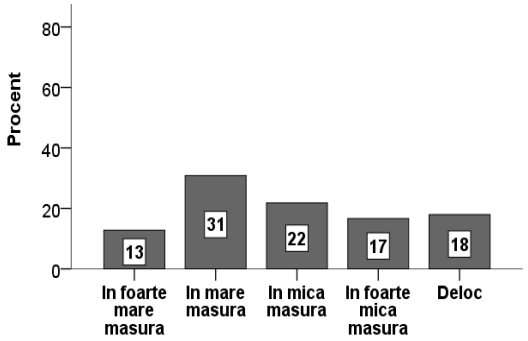
Q54

In the opinion of students, the university offers a wide range of internships. The internships are seen by the students as a true benefit in their training for the labour market.

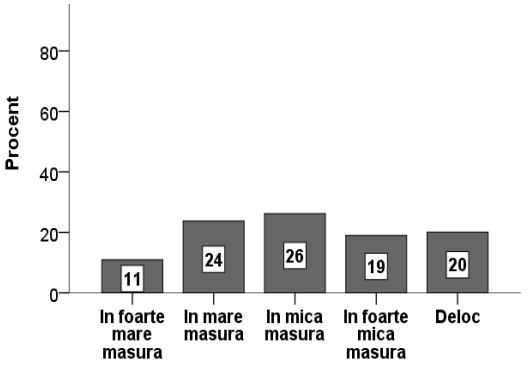
As for the confidence of students in finding a job after graduation about 61% of students are confident that they will succeed in integrating on labour market. Moreover, a similar proportion of students believe that they will find not only a job after graduation, but they will find the job desired for which they were trained.
Compared to the number of students who think that during the faculty they do not get the skills and competences they will need at workplace, the number of those who have confidence in the quality of higher education is significantly higher, so that 51% of students declare that there is an applicability in professional life of information, contents and experiences gained during the student years. Yet, there are 25% of students who declare that they think that in university they get to a small extent the skills and competences they will need at workplace.

To what extent do you agree with the statements below?

I am informed about the functioning of the department which organizes the study programme in which I am enrolled.



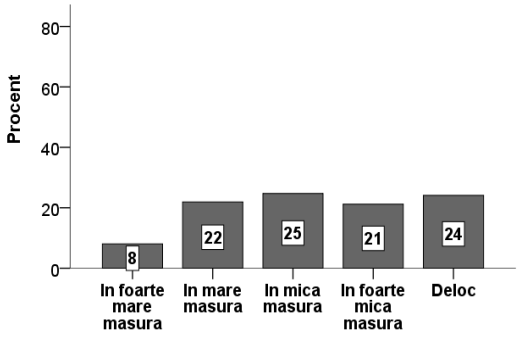
I am informed about the functioning of the Faculty Council in which I am enrolled.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q12

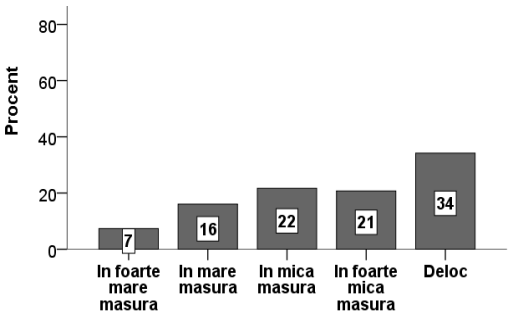
I am informed about the functioning of University Senate.



To a very large extent

Q13

I am informed about the functioning of Quality Assurance Commission from the faculty/university.

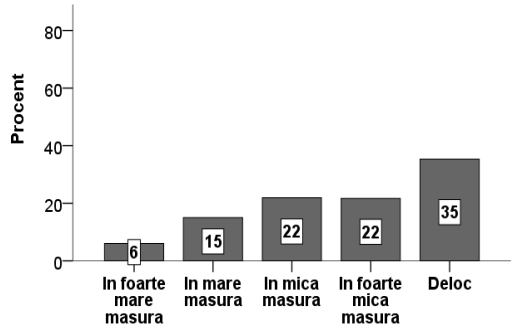


To a very large extent

To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q14

I am informed on the functioning of the Ethics Commission of the university.



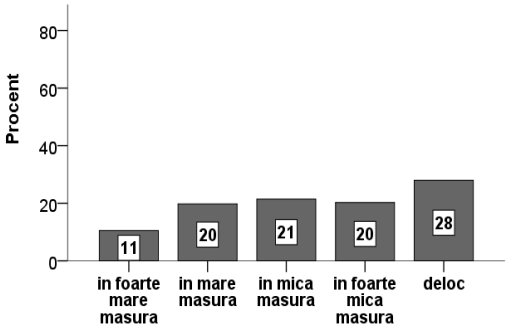
To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q17

To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q15

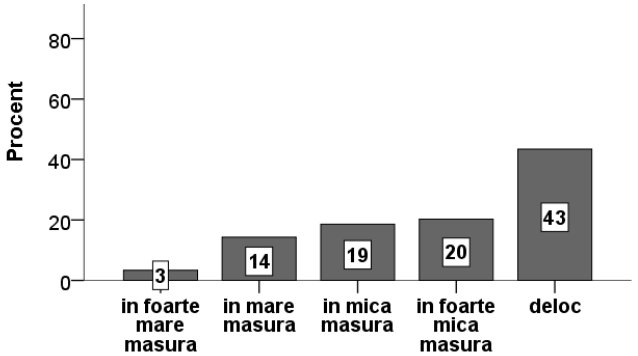
I am informed on the functioning of Counselling and Career Guidance Centre.



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q18

To what extent do you think that you are informed about the assignments and functioning of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education?



To a very large extent
To a large extent
To a small extent
To a very small extent
Not at all

Q19

The information that students have about the organizational and quality assurance structures in higher education varies according to the level where this information is found (institutional level -faculty, university and systemic level -ARACIS).
If at faculty level (department, faculty council) about 35% of students are informed to a large and very large extent in connection with the functioning of these structures, their percentage decreases when they are asked about structures at university level. 24 % of students answered that they are not informed at all about the University Senate, 34% in connection with the functioning of quality assurance commission, 35% in connection with the functioning of ethics commission of the university. As for the systemic level, 43% of students interviewed answered that they have no information about the assignments and functioning of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. We can thus see that the students get less and less information about the quality assurance structures in higher education as soon as it goes from institutional level to systemic level, significant differences are found even at institutional level between the structures from department level and/or faculty level and the structures from university level.

Technical information

The empirical data was collected by sociological survey with self-administration of an online questionnaire. The data collection was institutionally supported by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The perceptions of teaching staff were measured during 6 September – 31 October 2015, involving a representative sample of 916 persons. The perceptions of students were measured during 22 September – 4 November 2015, involving a representative sample of 896 persons.