



## 12th European Quality Assurance Forum

### Responsible QA – committing to impact

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### Paper proposal form

**Deadline 24 July 2017**

*Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.*

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He is, from 2015, the current president of the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR), the national student federation that represents the rights and interests of students in Romania, and a student representative (full member) in the Council of ARACIS.

He has more than 6 years of experience in student movement, being, in turn, student representative in the Faculty Council, University Senate and Administration Board of the West University of Timișoara, and member of diverse committees and working groups at a local or national level (university rankings, scholarships, university ethics and management etc.).

Interests area: quality assurance of higher education, social dimension of education, Bologna Process, university rankings.

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He is active as a full university professor, PhD coordinator for Mechatronics and Robotics, director of the Department of Mechatronics and Robotics. He is a fellow of IEEE Robotics and Automation Society, Romanian Society for Automation and Technical Informatics, and Romanian Society for Robotics. Dorian Cojocaru has served as Chairman and member of the Scientific Program Committees of numerous scientific national and international conferences. His present areas of research activity are: Computer Vision, Mechatronics and Robotics, Education Technologies, and Applied Informatics. He has published more than 10 books, more than 200 papers in various scientific journals and international conference proceedings and he coordinated more than 15 research national and international programs (FP6 MRTN, TEMPUS, ERASMUS/SOCRATES, Lifelong Learning Programme, FP7).

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Nicoleta Corbu is professor at the College of Communication and Public Relations, SNSPA. She is Member of the ARACIS Council since 2013. She currently coordinates, as an executive director, the Center for Research in Communication. She holds a PhD diploma in sociology, a master's degree in Linguistics, and bachelor's degrees in Romanian and French Languages and Literatures and Communication and Public Relations. She is the recipient of a Fulbright grant in the United States (University of Georgia, 2008-2009), and at present she is Fulbright Ambassador in Romania. In 2012, she was visiting professor at Florida Gulf Coast University. She coordinated research and strategic projects and published books in the fields of European studies, political communication, public policies in education. She published more than 40 articles and book chapters in similar fields.

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Founding member of the Romanian Statistics Club and member of the Romanian Statistical Society.

The research area: econometric modelling, branch statistics and macro statistics, survey technique (through the realization and coordination of representative quantitative studies at national level).

Research field: Economic development and sustainability, Analysis of the activity and quality of the higher education system.

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**Short bio (150 words max):** Simona Lache is professor in the field of mechanical engineering, at Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania. She graduated the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the same university in 1992 and obtained her PhD in 2001. Since 2008 she holds the position of vice-rector for quality evaluation and since 2012 she is also responsible for the university internationalization. Simona Lache works with the Romanian Agency of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), as expert evaluator, since 2007 and holds the position of executive board member as Director of Accreditation Department of ARACIS since 2015. Her publications are in the field of mechanical engineering, as well as in quality assurance of higher education and university - business cooperation. She was involved in several international projects related to developing transnational cooperation between universities and enterprises, fostering entrepreneurship by developing business incubators, or creating models for quality international practical placements for students.

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**Short bio (150 words max):** Florin Mihai is professor at The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, head of the Department of Management Information Systems within the Faculty of Accounting and Management Information Systems. He is also expert evaluator in the National Register of Evaluators of the Romanian Agency of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) since 2006, and since 2009 he is member of the Distance Learning Commission of ARACIS.

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He has participated in several international meetings on educational problems (including "Life Long Learning for equity and social cohesion").

The research area: Human Resources Management, Culture and Organizational Behaviour, Organizational change and culture, Organizational Management, Work ethics in educational organization in Romanian primary and secondary education, The first e-learning project focused on developing the entrepreneurial spirit in Romania.

Research field: The Entrepreneurial Culture in Romanian Public universities, Leadership in the university environment.

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*During the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum as well as the associated Powerpoint presentations will be published on the Forum website. If you do not wish your paper to be published, please indicate so here. This has no consequences on the selection of the papers. Please however note that all Powerpoint presentations will be published, regardless of whether the full paper is published.*

## Proposal

**Title:** Study concerning the evaluation of the quality of ARACIS activity by the higher education managers

**Abstract (150 words max):**

The continuous process of improving ARACIS activity has two major objectives: increasing the efficacy of the process of internal and external evaluation and the development of new standards / indicators / procedures of quality assurance. To reach these goals, it is essential to understand and assess the opinions regarding the quality of ARACIS' activity, and to identify the tendencies and risks regarding quality assurance in higher education in Romania.

In this context, it becomes useful to take into account on the one hand the perception of managers in higher education – the primary factor of the organizational and development processes – and, on the other hand, the perception of the evaluators who put in place the procedures regarding the quality assurance process developed by ARACIS.

**The paper is based on:** research / policy / practice (select one)

**Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? If yes, give details. No**

**Text of paper (3000 words max):**

*"The education of the entire world is above all"  
Pierre Athanase Larousse*

According to its objectives, ARACIS aims to periodically consult the higher education institutions in order to decide upon the priorities of quality assurance system and to conduct studies and analyses regarding the state of the quality of higher education in Romania.

To this end, during the time period January – April 2017, ARACIS conducted a quantitative study among the higher education institutions and the evaluators from the National Register of ARACIS Evaluators (NRE). [1]



**The main goal** of the research focuses on improving the evaluation of quality in higher education periodically performed by ARACIS and on strengthening the quality management in higher education institutions. To this purpose, two representative surveys at the system level were conducted, aiming at:

- a) Identifying *the opinion of higher education institutions (universities)* regarding the quality of activities conducted within the process of external evaluation performed by ARACIS;
- b) Surveying *the opinion of evaluators from the NRE of ARACIS* regarding the role the agency plays in the development of the higher education system in the following period of time.

The study investigated the quality of the activities conducted by ARACIS in the process of external evaluation of programmes and fields of study, as well as of universities.

In this research study, there were elaborated two questionnaires, following standard methodologies, recognized as references both in the international academic field, and in the business area: the HETQMEX<sup>1</sup> model – *instrument of evaluation of the quality management in higher education* and the SERVQUAL model – *instrument of evaluation of services*. [2], [3], [4]

Following the structure of the two models and adjusting them to construct items specific for the activities of ARACIS, we built *an instrument for the measurement of the quality of ARACIS activities*.

The study is based on two inter-related questionnaires:

- a. for **the external evaluation**, we used a questionnaire built specifically for the universities managers (Sample A)
- b. for **the self-evaluation** we used a questionnaire addressed to the ARACIS evaluators (Sample B)

Both questionnaires had five distinct sections:

- **The evaluation of the quality of ARACIS services (HETQMEX and SERVQUAL models);**
- **The evaluation of the mission and role of ARACIS;**
- **Tendencies and risks of the higher education system;**
- **Open ended questions** regarding the improvement of the activity of ARACIS evaluators and of the tendencies in the Romanian higher education, in the field of quality assurance;
- **Identification data.**

The logic progression of the questionnaires, starting with the discrete aspects (leadership, teamwork, assuming the problems etc.) toward more general aspects

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<sup>1</sup> Higher Education Total Quality Management Model of Excellence



(identifying risks and tendencies regarding quality in higher education) allows for a structured analysis of the complexity of the evaluation process regarding quality assurance in the national higher education system.

The statistical analysis of the dimensions/items from the two surveys offered a detailed image of strengths and weaknesses of ARACIS activity at the present moment and helped identify the most significant correlations with respect to the sources of beneficiaries' satisfaction.

In this paper, we will briefly present the results from the Sample A – university managers, that refers to the persons who are part of the management system of the higher education institution (HEI), rectors, vice-rectors, quality assurance directors, deans, etc.

The sample size was representative at the level of the Romanian higher education system (HES): 466 respondents from state HEI and 160 respondents from private HEI. [5]

### Section I. Evaluation of the quality of the services offered by ARACIS

Findings show (see Table 1) that all evaluated indicators scored very high<sup>2</sup>, both for the state HEI (Mean = 8.87 out of 10), and for the private institutions (Mean = 8.61). The difference between the means of the two types of institutions is only .263, not statistically significant. There is also a rather unified and convergent vision of both types of universities, for all analyzed criteria. The highest scores were obtained to the item testing on the “*University involvement in quality assurance*”, associated with the “*Total involvement*” dimension (9.56 for state HEI, and 9.35 for private institutions, respectively). Even though the item is sensitive to social desirability (a low score would be socially undesirable), yet the high score obtained in the analysis could also be associated with a high level of importance associated with quality assurance process in the higher education institutions in general.

Table 1

The mean values of dimensions of Management focused on quality in ARACIS

Dimension	Mean dimension total HEI	Mean dimension		Difference HEI S - HEI P
		State HEI (S)	Private HEI (P)	
1. Leadership	<b>8,58</b>	8,63	<b>8,39</b>	0,24
2. Commitment	<b>9,15</b>	9,16	9,11	0,05
3. Total customer satisfaction	<b>8,81</b>	8,93	8,42	<b>0,51</b>
4. Total involvement	<b>9,14</b>	9,22	8,89	0,33
5. Training education	<b>8,51</b>	8,54	8,42	0,12
6. Ownership of problem <sup>3</sup>	<b>8,41</b>	<b>8,41</b>	8,42	-0,01
7. Reward and recognition	<b>8,68</b>	8,75	8,43	0,32
8. Teamwork	<b>9,18</b>	9,32	8,72	0,6

<sup>2</sup> Q1. On a scale of 1 to 10, please rate the *management centered on quality within ARACIS*, where : 1 – very low level, 10 – highest level, DK/NA – Don't know, No answer)

<sup>3</sup> Assuming the problem

<b>General mean</b>	<b>8,81</b>	<b>8,87</b>	<b>8,60</b>	<b>0,27</b>
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At the opposite side of the spectrum, the lowest ranked aspects (even though they also have a very high score, above 8) are, for both types of HEI “design/updating standards according to universities expectations (M=8.14, and M=8.05, respectively), item specific for the “Assuming the problem” dimension. The lower score for this item reflects a slight discrepancy between universities expectations and the definition of new criteria. This situation could be generated both by deficiencies in consulting the academic environment, and by the limits of the communication channels between universities and ARACIS.

The cumulative analysis for each dimension reflects a situation that is to some extent different between state and private HEI. Thus, in the case of state HEI, the highest score was obtained for the dimensions “Teamwork” (M=9.32), “Total involvement” (M=9.22), and “Commitment” (M=9.12), whereas for the private HEI, these dimensions were “Commitment” (M=9.11), “Total involvement” (M=8.89), and “Teamwork” (M=8.72). For both types of institutions, the first three ranked items were the same, even though they had a different hierarchy, which reflects upon the importance placed on these indicators by the HEI (relationship with ARACIS, institutional communication, respecting the goals assumed by both ARACIS and the university etc.).

According to the regression analysis, the model and the variables in the analysis regarding the quality centered management within ARACIS are statistically validated (see data below):

#### Regression table for the items of the dimension “Total customer satisfaction”

##### SUMMARY OUTPUT

<i>Regression Statistics</i>						
Multiple R	0,879806					
R Square	0,774059					
Adjusted R Square	0,771388					
Standard Error	0,549761					
Observations	600					
<i>ANOVA</i>						
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>	
Regression	7	612,98	87,569	289,7363	0,0000000	
Residual	592	178,9244	0,30223			
Total	599	791,908				
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
<b>Intercept</b>	-0,0582	0,2539	-0,2291	0,8189	-0,5569	0,4406
1. Leadership	<b>0,3873</b>	0,0387	9,9966	0,0000	0,3112	0,4634
2. Commitment	-0,0080	0,0396	-0,2031	0,8391	-0,0859	0,0698
4. Total involvement	0,2555	0,0439	5,8203	0,0000	0,1693	0,3418
5. Training and education	-0,1027	0,0263	-3,9074	0,0001	-0,1543	-0,0511
6. Assuming the problem	0,0876	0,0392	2,2326	0,0260	0,0105	0,1646
7. Reward and recognition	0,1041	0,0381	2,7309	0,0065	0,0292	0,1789
8. Teamwork	<b>0,2752</b>	0,0363	7,5873	0,0000	0,2039	0,3464



Table 2. Correlation matrix<sup>4</sup> for the items of *Management focused on quality*

	Dimension	D.1	D.2	D.3	D.4	D.5	D.6	D.7
D.1	3. Total customer satisfaction (explained variable)	1						
D.2	1. Leadership	<b>0,8054</b>	1,0000					
D.3	2. Commitment	0,6586	0,6752	1,0000				
D.4	4. Total involvement	0,7675	0,7015	0,6952	1,0000			
D.5	5. Training and education	<b>0,5580</b>	0,6237	0,6124	0,6241	1,0000		
D.6	6. Assuming the problem	0,7554	0,8287	0,6688	0,6988	0,6769	1,0000	
D.7	7. Reward and recognition	0,7848	0,7833	0,6615	0,7353	0,6588	<b>0,8303</b>	1,0000
D.8	8. Teamwork	0,7915	0,6831	0,6955	0,7836	0,6334	0,6852	0,7790

According to the correlation analysis, the dimension “*Total customer satisfaction*” is statistically correlated strongest with “*Leadership*” and lowest with “*Training and education*”. In other words, (i) improvement of the activity of students’ instruction, (ii) objectivity and integrity assurance in the evaluation process, and (iii) a higher level of satisfaction regarding the results of the external evaluation are mostly determined by (iv) the fairness and the optimum assured by the procedures of external evaluation, (v) the efficacy of the evaluation mechanism, and (vi) the efficacy of the activities flow assured by the organizational structure of ARACIS.

## Section II. Evaluation of the mission and role of ARACIS

Table 3. Mean levels of the dimensions regarding the evaluation of the mission and role of ARACIS<sup>5</sup>

No.	Missions’ components	Mean values		General mean
		State HEI	Private HEI	
1.	Assessing, according to quality standards, the capacity of education providing organizations to fulfil the beneficiaries’ expectations	8,95	8,71	<b>8,90</b>
2.	Contributing to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality	8,97	8,82	<b>8,93</b>
3.	Assuring the protection of direct beneficiaries of study programmes at higher education level by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent and credible information, publicly accessible, about education quality	8,80	8,64	<b>8,77</b>
4.	Proposing to the Ministry of Education strategies and policies of permanently improving higher education	8,61	8,34	<b>8,54</b>

<sup>4</sup> Pearson’s correlation coefficient

<sup>5</sup> Q2. On a scale of 1 to 10, please evaluate to what extent ARACIS *fulfils its mission assumed*, in all its components: (where 1 – not at all; 10 – totally, DN/NA – Don’t know/No answer)



quality, in close correlation with pre-university education			
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High scores were obtained for all components of ARACIS mission, corresponding to positive evaluations from both types of higher education institutions (general mean above 8.50). Even though the differences between the items are very low, there are similar distributions of the scores obtained for both types of universities: (i) development of an organizational culture (M=8.97 for state HEI, M=8.82 for private HEI), (ii) evaluation of the capacity of the education providers (M=8.95, and M=8.71 respectively), (iii) direct beneficiaries protection assurance and dissemination of coherent and credible systemic information (M=8.80, and M=8.64 respectively), and (iv) proposal of strategies and policies for the improvement of the quality assurance process in higher education (M=8.61, and M=8.34 respectively).

### Section III. Tendencies and risks of the higher education system

The respondents were asked to select and rank **5 tendencies**<sup>6</sup> that will influence higher education in Romania in the next 5 years.

The findings regarding these tendencies show that the most significant problem is *the problem of cooperation between the higher education institutions and the socio-economic environment* (417). This is, certainly, not only a permanent goal, but also a *sine-qua-non* condition for a quality higher education, strongly anchored in the profile, structure and expectations of the socio-economic specific reality. This cooperation between universities and the socio-economic environment (employers, *alumni*) to the aim of developing the university curriculum adapted to the realities of the labour market assures a better employability of the graduates and implicitly an increased public impact of the university activity.

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<sup>6</sup> out of a total of 18 potential tendencies

### Hierarchy of the first 10 tendencies that will influence higher education in Romania in the next 5 years

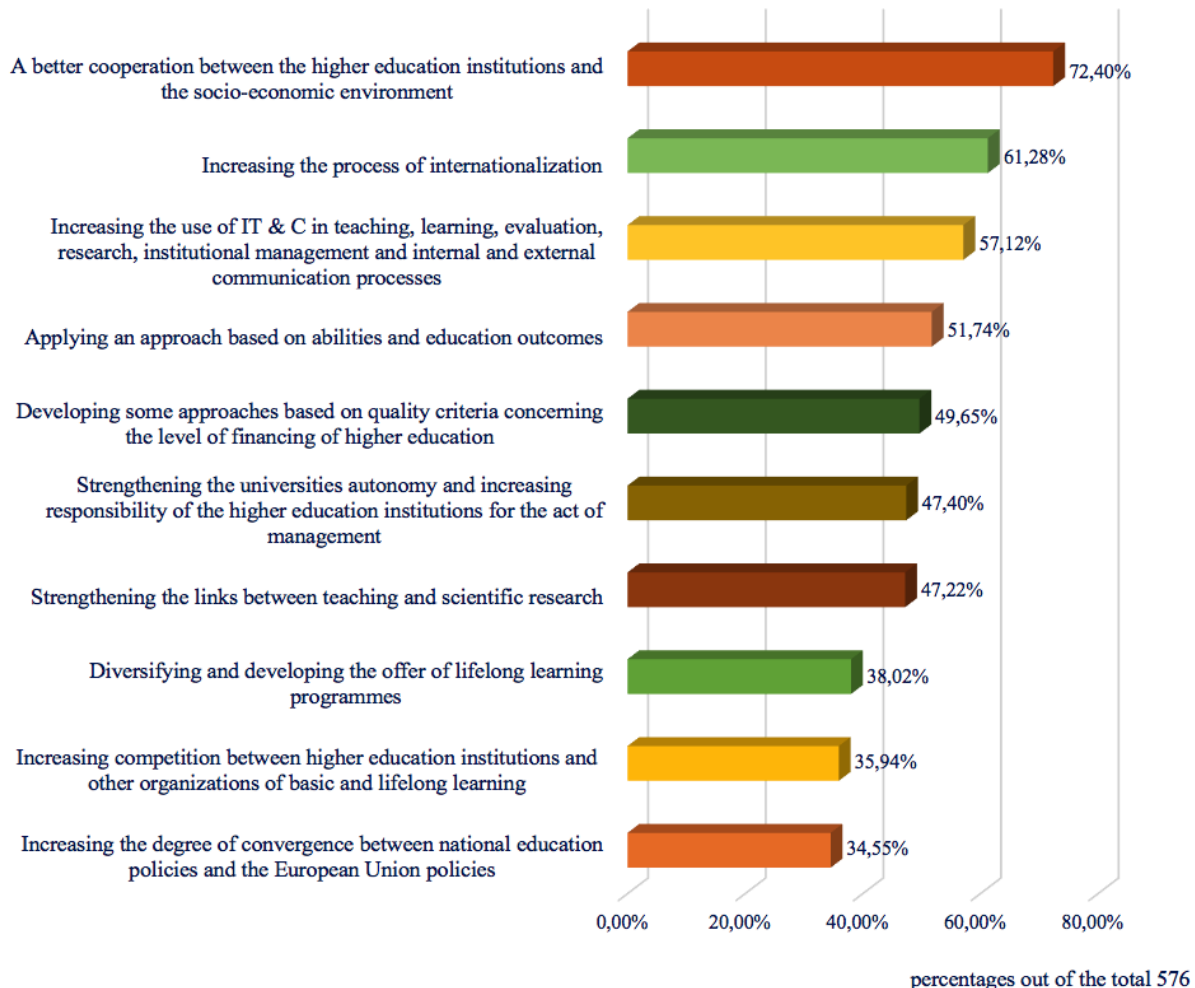
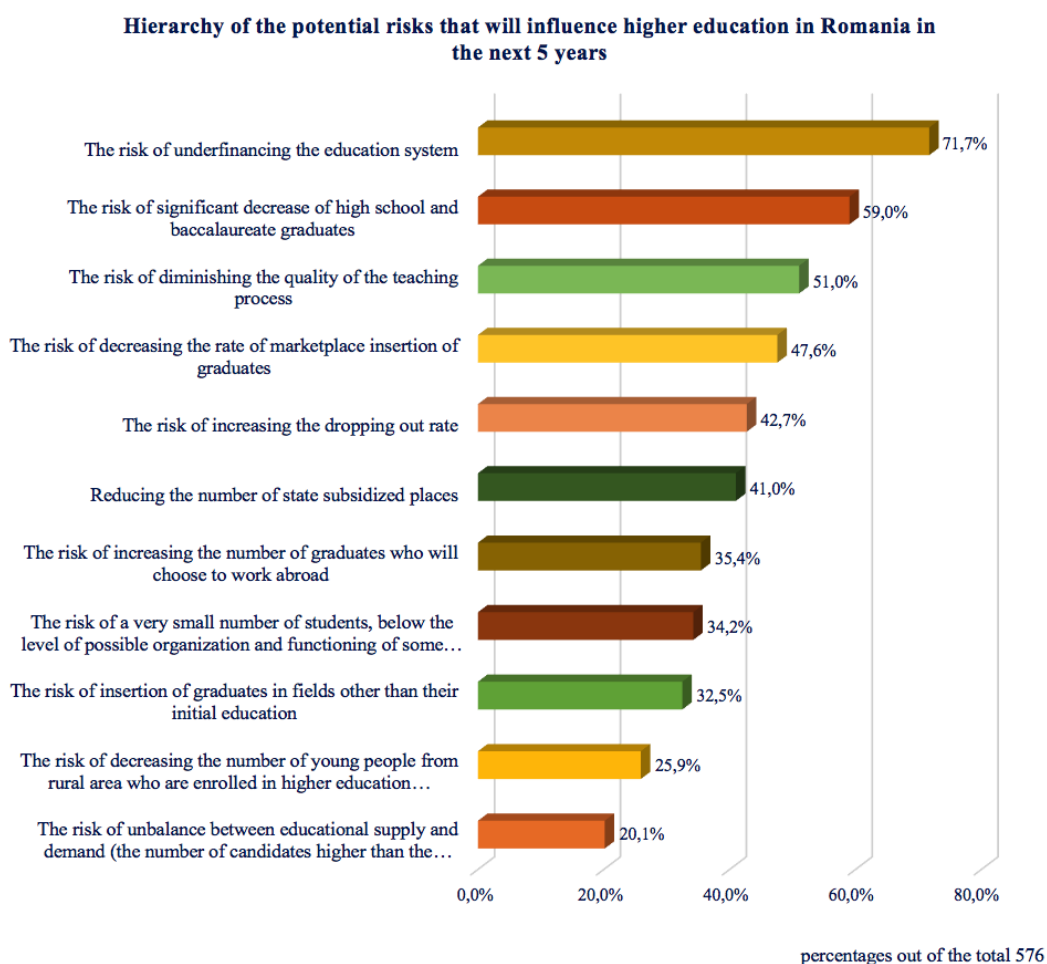


Figure 1.

The second tendency, also with a very high score, was *Increasing the process of internationalization* (353 responses). This tendency represents another logic condition for the transnational development of the components of the higher education system, increasingly involved in professional, academic, and scientific networks, usually resulting from various projects conducted in universities. It is difficult to conceive a higher education institution performing very well and which respects high standards of quality without emphasizing international mobility of students and professors or without an important representation of the institution in European scientific networks. At the other end of the spectrum, the least probable tendency was *Increasing the degree of convergence between national education policies and the European Union policies* (199 responses), this being probably perceived as a risk of uniformity and loss of institutional specificity for each education system.

In question Q5, respondents were asked to select and rank **5 risks**<sup>7</sup> that will influence higher education in Romania in the next 5 years.

As far as the perceived risks at the level of state and private HEI are concerned, the main aspects identified by the respondents are “The risk of underfinancing the education system” (413 respondents) and “The risk of significant decrease of high school and baccalaureate graduates” (340 respondents). These two problems, directly correlated, reflect a major risk of the national higher education system, in relation with the financial support, against a background of a decreasing number of high school and baccalaureate graduates that could be recruited in a university programme (enrolment capacity). Lacking a proper financial support might lead to diminishing the quality standards in the teaching activities, as well in the scientific research areas for all universities.



*Figure 2.*

<sup>7</sup> out of a total of 11 potential risks

## Section IV. Open-ended questions analysis

The number, distribution, and content of responses/opinions of open ended questions reflect the interest of the respondents for the topic in question.

For example, there were 408 opinions expressed for the question Q6 “Please mention the aspects you believe should be improved in the ARACIS evaluators activity”.

A summary of the opinions reveals the following aspects:

- The quality indicators defined in the ARACIS standards are identified as important means which could lead to a better quality of higher education in general;
- Respondents argue for reconsidering the weight of the results of the teaching, pedagogic activity itself in the higher institutions evaluation;
- Increasing the responsibility of the internal quality assurance systems is frequently cited as one of the main goals of all activities in this area;
- Financial support based on performance is identified as a possible solution to improve the results in higher education quality assurance and university management;
- A better use of new technologies is a constant goal at the universities level;
- Improving the level of adaptation to the demands of the labor market is one of the important instruments for increasing the quality of higher education in general;
- A key measure at the system level could be related to the convergence of the national and international quality standards;
- Students involvement in all activities related to the academic process could be improved;
- The academic system should continue to rely on ARACIS as an already validated mean to increasing quality, even if some improvements should be accomplished as well at the agency level.

The conclusions regarding the evaluation of ARACIS activity are presented below as a SWOT analysis.

### Synthesis of the positive and negative aspects revealed by the respondents of the university managers

Dimension	STRENGTHS Score above mean	WEAKNESSES Score below mean
<b>ARACIS mission and role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Contribution to the development of an institutional culture of quality in higher education</li> <li>✓ Evaluation of the capacity of education providers and of the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Assurance of the direct beneficiaries' protection with regard to the supply of study programmes, through the production and dissemination of systematic, coherent, and</li> </ul>

	expectations of the beneficiaries	<p>accessible information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Proposals of public policies and strategies for the constant improvement of quality in higher education (addressed to the Ministry of education), tightly correlated with the strategies and policies of secondary education</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluators activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ARACIS Evaluators' activity corresponds to the assumed mission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Excessive bureaucratization</li> <li>✓ Need for constant training of evaluators</li> </ul>
<b>Tendencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ARACIS is perceived as an important actor for the future, in the direction of improving the quality evaluation and the management in higher education (bachelor, master, and PhD levels), under the condition of a necessary improvement of its methods and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Formalism and bureaucracy</li> <li>✓ Financing of the Romanian higher education</li> <li>✓ Decreasing level of instruction of youth, pupils and students</li> <li>✓ Decreasing the importance of the teaching activities in the evaluation of the academic system</li> <li>✓ Implementation of the quality system at the internal level</li> <li>✓ Increasing the dropping out rate among students</li> </ul>
	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<b>ARACIS mission and role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Proposal of strategies and policies meant to improve the quality of higher education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Influence of the global context</li> <li>✓ Substantial changes in the European standards, compared to the national ones</li> <li>✓ Financing of the system of education and the national and European normative framework</li> <li>✓ Difficulty of obtaining a clear and pertinent feed-back from employers</li> <li>✓ Substantial changes in the educational needs of future generations of students</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluators activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Evaluation centered on the binomial teaching activity – research activity and less on the formal, bureaucratic, collateral aspects</li> <li>✓ Increasing the degree of professionalism of evaluators</li> <li>✓ Assurance of periodical training of evaluators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Uneven approach from one evaluation to the next within the same area</li> <li>✓ Teams of evaluators that are used to working together, under the risk of becoming subjective in their activity</li> </ul>
<b>Tendencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A higher weight given to the teaching process in the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Maximizing the weight of a number of criteria related to the</li> </ul>



	<p>evaluations of the academic system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Quality indicators defined by ARACIS in its standards are identified as an important mean to increasing quality in higher education, provided that they are constantly redefined and selected</li> <li>✓ Financing based on past performance</li> <li>✓ Internationally validated standards</li> </ul>	<p>capitalization of the results of research through publication, in comparison to other criteria of capitalization, such as the teaching process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Marginalization of the research component, in favour of scientific research</li> <li>✓ Emphasizing the differences between the output of the Romanian education system and similar European and global results</li> <li>✓ Massive devaluation of higher education degrees</li> </ul>
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We believe that the present report could be a useful guide and a working instrument of analysis meant to increase the efficacy of the quality evaluation process, thus contributing to the improvement of the national higher education system.

Following the same judgement, knowing the complexity and the interdependencies of phenomena in the evaluation and quality assurance processes, the managerial structures of higher education institutions, and the evaluators involved in ARACIS activities, respectively, could increase at least the awareness of the need of developing an internal culture of quality and a direct involvement into the implementation of mechanisms regarding quality assurance of the educational processes.

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**Discussion questions:**

Tendencies regarding the higher education system at the European Union level

Risks regarding the higher education system at the European Union level

*Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 24 July 2017 to [QAForum@eua.be](mailto:QAForum@eua.be). The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith\_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.*