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

# QAR

Q U A L I T Y  
A S S U R A N C E  
R E V I E W  
F O R H I G H E R E D U C A T I O N

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The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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**AGENȚIA ROMÂNĂ DE ASIGURARE A CALITĂȚII ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR**  
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Revista pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior este o publicație academică care se concentrează asupra asigurării calității în învățământul superior din România. Revista își propune să devină un instrument care să faciliteze transferul de bune practici și comunicarea între experții interni și externi și să contribuie la promovarea dezvoltării unei culturi a asigurării calității. QAR îi vizează pe cei interesați de teoria, practica și politicile din domeniul amintit.

**Editor**

Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior

**Adresa**

Bd. Mărăști, nr. 59, București, sector 1, cod poștal 011464

Telefon: +40 21 206 76 00, Fax: +40 21 312 71 35

E-mail: qar@aracis.ro

**Colegiul editorial**

Prof. univ. dr. ing. Radu-Mircea Damian

Conf. univ. dr. Emilia Gogu

Prof. univ. dr. Gheorghe Grigoraș

Prof. univ. dr. Romiță Iucu-Bumbu

Prof. univ. dr. Olguța Carmen Lupu

Prof. univ. dr. Adrian Opre

Prof. univ. dr. ing. Neculai Eugen Seghedin

**Redactor:** Prof. univ. dr. Cătălina Sitnikov

**Tehnoredactor:** Alina Ioachimescu

Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR) is an academic publication which focuses on aspects related to quality assurance in higher education in Romania. The journal aims to become an instrument for the transfer of best practices and to support communication between internal and external experts, as well as to contribute to the development of a quality assurance culture. QAR was created for those interested in the theory, practice and policies related to quality assurance in higher education.

**Editor**

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

**Mailing address**

Bd. Mărăști, no. 59, sector 1, Bucharest, Romania, postal code 011464

Phone: +40 21 206 76 00, Fax: +40 21 312 71 35

E-mail: qar@aracis.ro

**Editorial Board**

Prof. dr. eng. Radu-Mircea Damian

Associate prof. dr. Emilia Gogu

Prof. dr. Gheorghe Grigoraș

Prof. dr. Romiță Iucu-Bumbu

Prof. dr. Olguța Carmen Lupu

Prof. dr. Adrian Opre

Prof. dr. eng. Neculai Eugen Seghedin

**Editor:** Prof. dr. Cătălina Sitnikov

**Desktop Publisher:** Alina Ioachimescu

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# Social Responsibility in an Agency for Quality Assurance of Higher Education. The Case of AQU Catalunya

*Núria Comet Señal*

*Head of internal quality assurance  
AQU Catalunya  
ncomet@aqu.cat*

**Abstract:** *Social responsibility is currently a way of doing things that is fully integrated into the management of organisations, including universities. Quality agencies must not only collaborate with universities to promote social responsibility through assessment procedures, but must also incorporate social responsibility into their own management.*

*This article presents the case of the Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya, AQU Catalunya. From 2018 to 2020 AQU Catalunya undertook a process to implement social responsibility within its organisation. The article describes the stages that were carried out and the challenges for the future.*

**Keywords:** *social responsibility, integration, organisations management, assessment procedures*

**Rezumat:** *Responsabilitatea socială este, în prezent, o modalitate de acțiune pe deplin integrată în managementul organizațiilor, inclusiv al universităților. Agențiile de calitate trebuie nu doar să colaboreze cu universitățile pentru a promova responsabilitatea socială prin proceduri de evaluare, ci trebuie, de asemenea, să includă responsabilitatea socială în propriul management.*

*Acest articol prezintă cazul Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya, AQU Catalunya. Din 2018 până în 2020, AQU Catalunya a aplicat responsabilitatea socială în cadrul organizației. Articolul descrie etapele parcurse și provocările pentru viitor.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *responsabilitate social, integrare, managementul organizațiilor, proceduri de evaluare*

## Introduction

Corporate social responsibility is a new way of managing companies and organisations, based on the integration of social and environmental aspects. As defined in the *Green Paper: Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility* (Commission of the European Communities 2001) “Most definitions of corporate social responsibility describe it as a concept whereby

companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”.

The term social responsibility has been in widespread use since the 1970s. It emerged as all organisations, not just business organisations, recognised that they also had a responsibility to contribute to sustainable development. As ISO 26000 Guidance on Social Responsibility points out:(International Organization for Standardization 2010) “The elements of social responsibility reflect the expectations of society at a particular time, and are therefore liable to change. As society’s concerns change, its expectations of organizations also change to reflect those concerns”.

Integrating social responsibility implies that the organisation takes into consideration social, environmental, legal, cultural, political and organisational diversity, as well as economic conditions. For this reason, the purpose of mainstreaming social responsibility is for organisations to integrate all these considerations into their decision-making, as well as to be accountable for the impact of their activities.

Thus, it is necessary for organisations to behave ethically and transparently, to comply with legislation and to be consistent with international standards. In part, social responsibility implies assuming and analysing society’s expectations in order to respect them and make them effective (human rights, environment, etc.). It also implies understanding the role of stakeholders in social responsibility, as the ISO 26000 Guidance on Social Responsibility (International Organization for Standardization 2010) points out: “Stakeholder identification and engagement are central to addressing an organisation’s social responsibility. An organisation should determine who has an interest in its decisions and activities, so that it can understand its impacts and how to address them. While stakeholders can help an organisation to identify the relevance of particular matters of decisions and activities, stakeholders do not replace society as a whole in determining standards and expectations of behaviour”.

In its beginnings, social responsibility was essentially applied to business, but it has evolved and adapted to different types of organisation: for example, governments (GSR), universities (USR), not-for-profit organisations (OSR), etc.

Quality agencies should also be another type of organisation where these principles are adapted.

## **The Role of Quality Assurance Agencies**

As Anna Prades stated in her presentation at the EQAF seminar in 2019(Prades 2019): “Quality assurance agencies have been at the heart of EHEA and are political levers to move HEIs out of their comfort zone, to meet quality standards (defined through a stakeholder negotiation process), using a methodology that relies on self-assessment and peer review. Indeed, Lee Harvey and Jethro Newton argue that quality assurance is ubiquitous because it provides a means for governments to check HE; quality assurance ensures not only accountability, but can be used to encourage a degree of compliance with policy requirements (Lee Harvey 2007).

It is interesting to note, however, that the narratives about what is important to evaluate have changed over the years: accountability versus improvement, learning outcomes, teaching and learning, and, recently, social impact.

Indeed, two of the most influential policy narratives of our time are in crisis: the knowledge society and European integration (Liviú 2015). According to Curaj et al. (Bergan S. 2018), in order to move to the next level of Bologna, we need to focus both on fundamental values relevant for our time (equity of access, ethical integrity, etc.) and on concrete commitments and objectives related to the evolution of other policy agendas (EU, OECD, UNESCO, Council of Europe, etc.). One of these policy objectives are the aforementioned Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations in 2015. Assessing the social dimension of the same could be a tool for accountability and improving the quality of this dimension.”

### **The Case of AQU Catalunya**

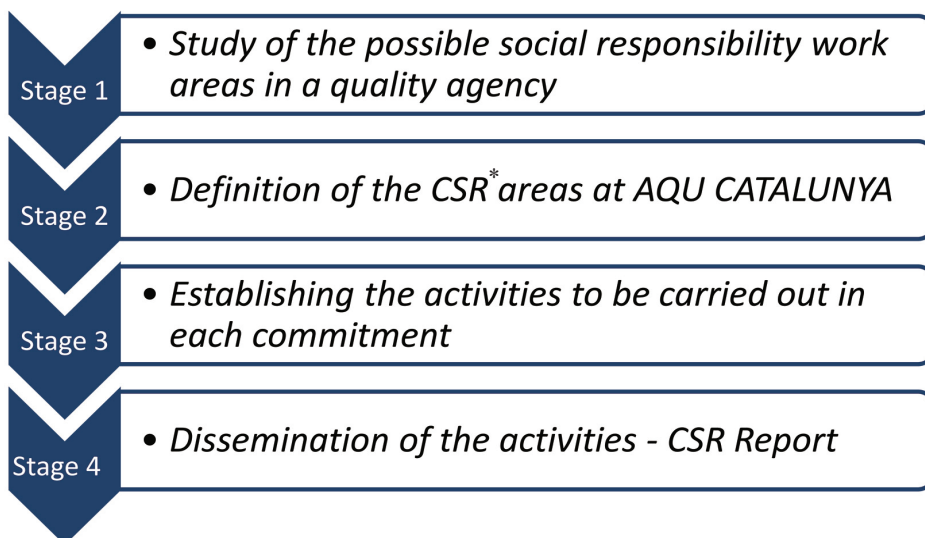
The integration of social responsibility has always been present in AQU Catalunya, with different activities, but it wasn't given a defined working framework until 2018. In 2018, during the drafting of the Strategic Plan, the strategic line of action was established as follows:

***Analyse the areas of social responsibility applicable to AQU Catalunya and respond to them.***

AQU Catalunya's aim was to highlight the role that a quality agency should play as an organisation in its own right in addition to the actions that are carried out to strengthen university social responsibility.

To this end, a structured work plan with different phases was established:

### **WORK PLAN**



\* CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility

## **1. Study of Social Responsibility Work Areas in an Agency.**

All authors agree that social responsibility includes many areas of work, and the first objective was to define which areas of work would be applicable to AQU Catalunya.

The following sources were taken into consideration in order to find out which areas are included in social responsibility:

- The ISO 26000 Guide to Social Responsibility (International Organization for Standardization 2010), which is an international standard that provides guidance to organisations for integrating Social Responsibility.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) developed by the United Nations, which arise from the 2030 Agenda and aim to ensure that the development of society is undertaken with respect for human rights and the environment.
- The guide of the Global Reporting Initiative (Global Reporting Initiative 2016), which serves as a guideline for organisations to prepare sustainable reports.

### *ISO 26000 GUIDANCE ON SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY*

This international standard aims to guide organisations in the area of social responsibility. In this way, it establishes which are the principles that integrate it, which are its fundamental matters and how these can be integrated by the organisation. The standard is applicable to both private and public, profit and non-profit organisations, regardless of their size.

The standard is structured as follows:

Clause 1. Scope.

Clause 2. Terms and definitions.

Clause 3. Understanding social responsibility.

Clause 4. Principles of social responsibility.

Clause 5. Recognising social responsibility and engaging stakeholders.

Clause 6. Guidance on social responsibility core subjects.

Clause 7. Guidance on integrating social responsibility throughout an organisation.

This sets out the principles of social responsibility, which are:

- Accountability
- Transparency
- Ethical behaviour
- Respect for stakeholders' interests
- Respect for the rule of law
- Respect for international norms of behaviour
- Respect for human rights

In addition, the core areas of social responsibility are also identified:

- Organisational governance
- Human rights
- Labour practices

- The environment
- Fair operating practices
- Consumer issues
- Community involvement and development

From the analysis it was felt that the areas most directly linked to AQU Catalunya's work would be:

- Organisational governance
- Labour practices
- Community involvement and development

### *SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS*

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stem from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015. The 2030 Agenda is a comprehensive, multidimensional and is universally applicable agenda – referring to the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) – developed through a system of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through which it aims to address major global challenges, from the fight against poverty or climate change to education, health, gender equality, peace or sustainable cities. Each SDG includes different targets (169 in total) that contribute to the achievement of the goal.

In this way, the 17 SDGs highlighted those that have a relationship with AQU Catalonia and which specific points may be applicable:



*Goal 4. To ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all:*

- 4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

- 4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
- 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

*Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*

- 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

*Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.*

- 8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

*Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.*

- 10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.

*Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.*

*Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.*

- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
- 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

*Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.*

- 17.14 Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development.
- 17.16 Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge,

expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries.

17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

### *GLOBAL REPORTING INITIATIVE*

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is an institution whose main objective is to provide a reliable framework for sustainability reporting, so that organisations can use it to integrate sustainable values in their reports.

Thus, the GRI Standards determine the criteria to be applied for sustainability reporting (in section three) and the reporting principles (in section four). Section five gives the basic contents of sustainability reports.

In terms of criteria and principles, section four lists the principles for determining the content of the report, on the one hand, and the principles for determining the quality of the report, on the other.

Principles for determining the content of the report:

- Stakeholder inclusiveness: determine who the organisation's stakeholders are and how it responds to their expectations.
- Sustainability context: look at how the organisation performs in the broader context of sustainability.
- Materiality: reflect the most relevant environmental and social aspects.
- Completeness: comprehensive and reliable compilation of information.

Principles for determining the quality of the report:

- Balance: refers to showing both negative and positive aspects.
- Comparability
- Accuracy
- Timeliness
- Clarity
- Reliability

In terms of basic content, the guide differentiates between general content and specific content (which it breaks down into specific indicators).

General content:

- Strategy and analysis
- Organisational profile
- Material aspects and coverage
- Stakeholder engagement
- Report profile
- Governance
- Ethics and integrity

Specific content:

- Information on management approach
- Indicators: which are divided into three areas:
  - Economics
  - Environmental
  - Social
- Labour practices and decent work
- Human rights
- Society
- Product responsibility

Therefore, with respect to the GRI Guidelines, the GRI Guidelines determine three essential areas into which a sustainability report will be divided: economy, environment and social performance, which is subdivided into labour practices and decent work, human rights, society and product responsibility. However, account should also be taken of the general contents which, although the guide is not broken down into specific indicators, should also be taken into account when drawing up a sustainability report.

AQU Catalunya identified the most relevant areas:

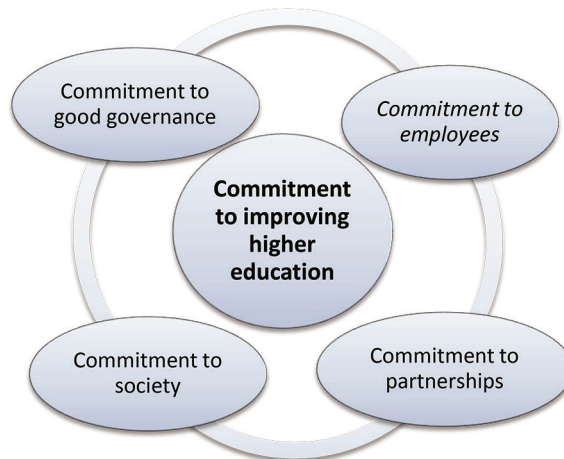
- economics,
- society and social performance, integrating the environment,
- labour practices,
- product responsibility.

These areas were discussed and validated by the AQU Catalunya Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee is the consultative body that collaborates with the Agency in advising on strategies, defining and improving procedures and drawing up proposals for action, with the aim of guaranteeing the quality of the Agency's activities, in accordance with international benchmarks. It is made up of national and international academics with international experience and recognised prestige, students from Catalan universities and representatives of the majority trade unions in Catalonia, who must be academics. They were subsequently approved by the Management Board of AQU Catalunya.

## **2. Definition of the Areas of Social Responsibility at AQU CATALUNYA**

Once an analysis had been made of the areas covered by the different documents presented, the areas and commitments most directly related to the aims and objectives of AQU Catalunya were chosen:

- commitment to the enhancement of higher education as the main commitment,
- commitment to good governance,
- commitment to employees,
- commitment to society and
- commitment to alliances.



Spheres of social responsibility at AQU Catalunya, and their relationship with the ISO 26001 standard, GRI and the Sustainable Development Goals.

AQU Catalunya	ISO 26001	GRI	SDG
<b>Commitment to improving higher education</b>		Product responsibility	Goal 4. Education
<b>Commitment to good governance</b>	Governance of the organisation	Economics	Goal 16. Promote peaceful societies Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development
<b>Commitment to partnerships</b>	Fair operating practices	Social performance	Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
<b>Commitment to employees</b>	Labour practices	Labour practices	Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
<b>Commitment to society</b>	Human rights Consumer issues Active participation and community development	Social performance	

- Commitment to improving higher education: This is the core area where the Agency's own and main tasks are carried out. This commitment is fully linked to AQU Catalunya's mission "to guarantee the quality of higher education in Catalonia, meeting international quality, academic and social standards, and attending to the interest that society has in quality higher education".
- Commitment to good governance: AQU Catalunya integrates social responsibility into its governing bodies and its strategy, to ensure more transparent, egalitarian and participatory governance. This includes a commitment to a balanced budget without wasting the material, financial and human resources available to the Agency.
- Commitment to employees: It is important that the Agency's commitment also operates internally, i.e. with the staff that make up AQU Catalunya. The commitment includes key aspects for the well-being and health of workers: equal conditions, work-life balance, uses of time, lifelong learning, healthy working environment, gender policies.
- Commitment to society: The Agency's commitment cannot be limited only to its direct stakeholders but also to society as a whole, as well as being respectful of social values in the performance of its tasks. One of the most relevant tools is the provision of up-to-date, reliable and useful information and dissemination of information on higher education in Catalonia for society and students in particular. It should be noted that commitment to the environment and the promotion of a more sustainable activity is included in this area.
- Commitment to partnerships: One of the outstanding elements of AQU Catalunya is its coordinated task with other agencies, higher education bodies, as well as social entities and collaborative networks. Thus, the Agency works together with other public bodies, both national and international, to improve the quality of higher education.

Through these five commitments that become work areas, AQU Catalunya integrates social responsibility in its activity, defined in the Strategic Plan and the annual activity plan, so that the impact that its activity has reaches its different stakeholders (universities, students, AQU Catalunya staff, experts, government, and society in general).

### **3. Establishing the Activities to Be Carried out in Each Commitment.**

Once the commitments were defined, the activities that AQU Catalunya carries out to highlight them were defined. These activities are a starting point, and are reviewed annually during the monitoring and preparation of the activity plan.

<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Commitment to improving higher education as the main commitment	Institutional assessment Programme assessment Teaching staff assessment Knowledge generation activities
Commitment to good governance	Strategic management Transparency Accounting and financial management Internal management Code of ethics
Commitment to employees	Lifelong learning Occupational health and safety Human resources policy Selection processes
Commitment to society	Knowledge portals: Study portal, Talent portal Communication and dissemination: workshops, seminars Knowledge generation: publication of reports, methodologies and working tools
Commitment to partnerships	Institutional relations International relations: quality networks Relations with social agents: participation in working groups Experience exchange

#### **4. Dissemination of Social Responsibility**

Once these activities have been carried out, AQU Catalunya's aim is to publicise them. For this reason, since 2019, the AQU Catalunya report on activities has morphed into a report on activities and corporate social responsibility (AQU 2020).

The AQU Catalunya 2020 Report on Activities and Corporate Social Responsibility, like the previous year, is structured on the basis of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments to which the Agency wishes to respond. Each of these commitments, in turn, is linked to one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

#### **5. Challenges for the Future**

For AQU Catalunya, social responsibility is not a separate activity. The spirit of the Agency was continued by integrating social responsibility into the leadership, activities and day-to-day management in an integrated manner with the existing externally certified quality management and information security systems.

Having established and consolidated the work axes, AQU Catalunya has set itself a number of challenges for the future. Some of these challenges include identifying and recognising new needs and expectations of both internal and external stakeholders.

Likewise, as an internal management tool, internal indicators should be defined to measure the degree of activity and establish objectives to be achieved. In this

task, it will be necessary to take into account the adaptation to the quality agencies of the work already carried out, such as the proposal made by the university quality agencies of Andorra and Aragon (AQUA-ACPUA 2019) within the project ‘Making connections between the institutional evaluation and the Sustainable Development Goals: Empowering stakeholders for quality enhancement’, co-funded by INQAAHE and the guide “How to assess the SDGs in universities” (REDS 2020).

Social responsibility implies a way of managing organisations taking into account the impact that their actions have on their stakeholders, from internal staff, students, teachers and institutions to the environment and society in general. Therefore, one of the great difficulties will be to assess the medium-term impact of these activities, not only in the immediate context, such as in the university system in Catalonia, but within all sectors as a much more ambitious challenge within the 2030 Agenda.

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## Social Responsibility and Universities in Slovenia

*Armand Faganel*

*Assoc. Prof. Dr.*

*University of Primorska, Slovenia*

*armand.faganel@gmail.com*

*+386 5610 2000*

**Abstract:** *Modern universities are expected to act socially responsible, in the public interest, and for the benefit of all interested stakeholders, internal and external. Although understanding and definitions of social responsibility vary, a short literature overview has been offered. Through the content analysis of Slovenian universities' texts in their missions, strategies, last published self-evaluation reports, and quality manuals, the appearance of the term social responsibility has been verified. However, as there are many different definitions of social responsibility, study results do not show a homogeneous assertion of this term in documents. Consequently, it is impossible to find a unified philosophical view of a university's role in society. Nevertheless, findings show some differences in how public and private universities deal with these questions.*

**Keywords:** *social responsibility, quality assurance, university, Slovenia, higher education, EHEA*

**Rezumat:** *Este de așteptat ca, din punct de vedere social, universitățile moderne să acționeze responsabil în interesul public și în beneficiul tuturor părților interesate, interne și externe. Deși înțelegerea și definițiile responsabilității sociale variază, în cadrul articolului a fost prezentată o scurtă trecere în revista a literaturii de specialitate. Prin analiza conținutului textelor misiunii, strategiilor, rapoartelor de autoevaluare publicate recent și manualelor calității din cadrul universităților slovene, a fost evaluată apariția termenului de responsabilitate socială. Ca urmare, deoarece există numeroase definiții, diferite, ale responsabilității sociale, rezultatele studiului nu identifică, în cadrul documentelor, o structură omogenă a termenului. În consecință, este imposibil să se identifice o viziune filosofică unică a rolului unei universități în societate. Cu toate acestea, constatările prezintă unele diferențe în ceea ce privește modul în care universitățile publice și private tratează aceste situații.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *responsabilitate socială, asigurarea calității, universitate, Slovenia, educație superioară, EHEA*

## **I. Introduction**

Social responsibility is the subject of research as the complexity of relationships and behaviours that affect the lives of future generations and as a basis for social and political action, taking into account the freedom and dignity of people (Bohinc 2016, 15). Socially responsible action takes as its development basis the knowledge, education and creative work, the price of which is formed mainly on the principle of contribution to added value and less on the labour market. Social responsibility is the responsibility of everyone - individuals and groups, to act in their life and social roles so that others have the same quality living conditions and do not interfere with the rights of others by exercising their rights (ibid.). However, some critics of the concept of social responsibility believe that social responsibility is just a fad and warn about the hypocrisy of using the concept, as most organisations see it as a tool to promote and improve their goodwill in society – a phenomenon also called whitewashing (Cherry 2014, 284; Fietze, Matiaske, and Menges 2019, 143; Wexler 2013, 817).

Organisations tend to use it as part of reactive strategies in times of crisis when they suffer a loss of reputation and then incorporate it into proactive strategies to maintain their reputation, while the nature of the business often remains unchanged. Podnar and Golob (2002, 952) emphasise the need for an internal leap in action and thinking; that the initial prevailing understanding of social responsibility as a source of organisation's differentiation is thus transformed into an understanding of social responsibility as a standard of action. Razak (2021, ix) argues that social responsibility cannot be treated as a 'fashionable' term in the education field anymore, even more in the higher education setting. It is already embedded in the reality of the best universities, together with their usual mission. Community and the larger environment of universities are becoming more and more involved and engaged, expanding the traditional roles of higher education institutions. It could also be stated that universities, in particular, make an essential component of co-creating and co-learning knowledge.

## **II. Literature Review**

The sustainable and environmentally oriented development paradigm of Western cultures is increasingly moving toward the social responsibility of an integrated society. An organisation with its elements is no exception, and its responsible conduct is becoming the rule.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is often included in the last decades' organisational discourse, and there were many attempts to identify and define what it means (Okoye 2009, 613). Different understanding of the concept can lead to some misinterpretations. However, it is also true that substantial diversity issues discussed under the CSR term do not ease the efforts to form an all-embracing definition. Gallie (1956, 167) explained that certain concepts are unavoidably contested by their nature. Moreover, like many other concepts in social sciences,

CSR is one of them. Dahlsrud (2006) analysed 37 CSR definitions and proposed five CSR dimensions through content analysis. Analysis showed "that the existing definitions are to a large degree congruent. Thus, it is concluded that the confusion is not so much about how CSR is defined as about how CSR is socially constructed in a specific context." Rahman (2011), for example, proposed 10 CSR dimensions. Furthermore, the European higher education setting context is specific and still "under construction", changing as the entire society does.

If social responsibility is planned to be embedded in the higher education system, it represents an articulation of its dedication to society (Albareda Tiana and Alférez Villarreal 2016, 719). This bond is strongly connected to reaching sustainable development within its social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. It also brings the need of changing the university curriculum. Sterling (2007) recommends choosing the road versus education for sustainability, incorporating social responsibility, to convey the university's mastery successfully and to please social needs. Social responsibility means to have the power for an effective response to the society's changes; it can be done through taking the responsibility of the institution's actions and with the promotion of solidarity, justice, promotion of sustainable development and social equity (Albareda Tiana and Alférez Villarreal 2016, 720).

Suppose we summarise different definitions of social responsibility. In that case, we can conclude that the concept of social responsibility means development taking into account tradition and all stakeholders, or as Bertoneclj et al. (2015, 119) state, it is a "sustainable operation of the company, taking into account the interests of all stakeholders and its interests, including profit-making, and consistently respecting ethical and moral principles". According to Babnik (2020), socially responsible activity in educational institutions is manifested primarily in the commitment to achieving quality education, offering quality content and at the same time in caring for the preservation of tradition and the transfer of knowledge.

Since the primary concern of the universities is not to increase capital but to offer quality services, their implementation and care for all stakeholders, we could say that the institution acts socially responsible only if it acts in the public interest and for the benefit of all stakeholders. Moreover, the way organisations operate today has a significant impact on people's lives because of the supply of products and services and increasingly because of working conditions, human rights, the environment, education, and training (European Commission, n.d.).

Annex II of the EHEA Rome ministerial communique (2020, 4) writes: "The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at the system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level. Strengthening the social dimension of higher education and fostering equity and inclusion to reflect the diversity of society is the responsibility of a higher education system as a whole and should be regarded as a continuous commitment."

Within the EHEA, there is an essential distinction between "core values" such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff, and

"social values" such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Universities are responsible for both. Education must be more than a process of acquiring practical competencies, skills and knowledge - its task is to shape the personality and character of young people and help them become mature and responsible citizens. This includes conveying values openly and critically. In doing so, we must consider that we are all exposed to many influences, primarily through social media, and that everyone entering universities has already acquired specific values. Therefore, institutions should be aware of the virtual circle - they educate teachers who will one day teach students. Today's kids who will shape the world tomorrow should not teach (only) about yesterday's values but should consider that values can develop. A critical approach to resources is a fundamental competence of research. "Universities must ensure that this approach also becomes a core competence in our societies. If the responsibility towards society is to become a central part of the university mission, the action also should be taken at political level" (ACA and DAAD 2019, 1-2).

As we see it, social responsibility is not a one-time act but a lengthy process. Fras Haslinger et al. (2007) suggest that organisations follow the subsequent steps in introducing social responsibility. Step 1: Formulate organisational values and include the principles of social responsibility among the company's values. Step 2: Incorporate social responsibility into the mission, vision and long-term goals of their activities. Step 3: Develop an independent SR strategy or incorporate SR into the organisation's strategy. Social responsibility should be included according to the individual functions of the organisation and should be based on the relationship with all stakeholders. Step 4: active implementation of the organisation's strategy and thus also indirectly social responsibility and informing employees about possible changes to achieve the goals. Step 5: Monitor the implementation of the strategy and any changes or improvements. Step 6: Encourage other organisations within the field to incorporate the principles of social responsibility into their activities through experience and development and communicate socially responsible activities with the general public.

Besides different funding sources and systems for research and education, the valuation systems and competing in ranking present another critical stumbling block for promoting the university's social responsibility because societal impact does not count as much as the established standards for research performance. Teacher promotion systems at universities are also based on similar criteria (Fredman 2020, lii).

Among diverse HEI's stakeholders, students represent one of the priority groups. The aggravated situation in obtaining a job leads graduates/job seekers to critically consider what they have gained through the study period that fluctuated between formal productivity and actual knowledge. It is the moral core of the social responsibility of higher education, which pursues a balance between earnings and quality. Higher education legislation and policy are crucial in allowing diplomas to

be awarded when high quality is guaranteed. Otherwise, this quality will not exist because it is expensive and reduces earnings. However, students need to know that low-quality knowledge for a low price in the job race after 2020 will not pay off for them (Pivec 2010, 1).

Kvasničková Stanislavska et al. (2014, 98) discussed the concept of social responsibility within public HEI's in the Czech Republic and researched the attitudes and expectations of two stakeholder groups in an HEI regarding the HEI's social responsibility in the Czech Republic. As focus groups' results demonstrate, today's students and potential students do not show sufficient social responsibility's theoretical knowledge. They understand the concept primarily as sports and social events related. Some students consider the concept related to the HEI's ecological undertakings. The study displayed some dissonance regarding the potential individual students' involvement in socially responsible activities. Nevertheless, many students are ready to join in their free time in socially responsible activities if they appear meaningful to them.

### III. Empirical Analysis

Slovenia has six universities, three public and three privates. Three public are the University of Ljubljana, the oldest – from 1919 and biggest – with 40,000 students, the University of Maribor and University of Primorska, the youngest – from 2003. They are regionally deployed, with Ljubljana placed centrally. Privates are the University of Nova Gorica, from 2006, the University of Novo Mesto from 2017 and New university from 2017. Content analysis has been used to assess the state of Slovenian universities' attitudes towards social responsibility and the actual situation in their official documents. Documents in consideration were searched for on public websites of universities in four categories: university's mission, university's strategy, their last published self-evaluation report (SER), and quality manual. The phrase we were looking for was 'social responsibility'.

First, we looked at the university's mission; as we learned from literature (ACA and DAAD, 2019; Razak, 2019), social responsibility should represent a central part of the university mission.

university	text
University of Ljubljana	<i>The University of Ljubljana implements and promotes fundamental, applied and developmental research and pursues excellence and the highest quality and ethical criteria in all scientific fields and art. Furthermore, in these areas of national identity, the University of Ljubljana specifically develops and promotes Slovenian scientific and professional terminology. (University of Ljubljana, n.d.)</i>

<p>University of Maribor</p>	<p><i>The mission of the University of Maribor is based on honesty, curiosity, creativity, freedom of spirit, cooperation and knowledge transfer in the field of science, art and education. Concerned with mankind and sustainable development, the University of Maribor expands knowledge, raises awareness, and promotes humanistic values and the culture of dialogue, quality of life and global justice. (University of Maribor, n.d.)</i></p>
<p>University of Primorska</p>	<p><i>UP's mission is to contribute to the global knowledge base through constructive cooperation and courageous competition in the global university space. At the same time, it draws ideas and solutions to develop cooperation with society and industry in which it operates, within Slovenia and throughout Europe. (University of Primorska, n.d.)</i></p>
<p>University of Nova Gorica</p>	<p><i>The University of Nova Gorica believes that its mission is to create new knowledge in a harmonious relationship between students and researchers, pass this knowledge on to younger people generation and in the business environment, and ensure the highest possible employability of their graduates. Regardless of its private character, UNG makes sure that its programs are accessible to all social strata. (University of Nova Gorica, n.d.b)</i></p>
<p>University of Novo Mesto</p>	<p><i>As one of the national science centres, the University will be the central bearer of the region's autonomous, intellectual, moral, cultural, and economic potential and beyond. It will carry out its mission through all employees and students' dedicated and science-supported work. The work's success will be reflected in education, scientific research, and business achievements. Based on the commitment to excellence in education and research, the University will contribute to the development of society, quality of individuals' lives, and the sustainable development of the environment. (University of Novo Mesto, 2020)</i></p>
<p>New university</p>	<p><i>The New university bases its scientific and educational mission on the foundation of state-building constitutional and national sources of the Republic of Slovenia, emphasising legal and welfare state values, sovereign and democratic arrangements of the republic, and respect for human rights fundamental freedoms. (New university, 2020a)</i></p>

There are no mentions of social responsibility in the universities' missions. Then we checked universities' strategies, where it was expected to find at least some traces of the latest "buzz words" that are much more than buzz words. The two most prominent public universities included social responsibility explicitly in their strategies.

university	text
University of Ljubljana	<p><i>The University of Ljubljana exercises social responsibility by transforming knowledge into practice. This is achieved through developmental, research, and professional activities, employment graduates in other organisations, encouraging entrepreneurship, counselling services, and including professional experts in educational activities by lifelong learning programmes. (University of Ljubljana, 2012)</i></p>
University of Maribor	<p><i>One of the strategic goals (University of Maribor, 2021): Compliance with the principles of social responsibility and sustainable development in all activities conducted by the University. One of the indicators (University of Maribor 2020a): Updated and consolidated UM Code of Ethics, which will include issues for whistle-blowers protection - by 2025, to realise the goal: Perform activities for further development of culture quality based on responsibilities, ethics, transparency and involving all stakeholders. To realise another goal - Long-term development of study programs and socially responsible enrolment planning three activities are planned to be realised by 2024 (University of Maribor, 2020a): Development indicators in the field enrolment policy as part of educational indicators activities at UM; Enrolment policy indicators are part of educational indicators activities at UM; Preparation of a comprehensive strategy in the field of promotion of enrolment with focus on the talented candidates for study.</i></p> <p><i>Another goal (University of Maribor, 2020a): Sustainable, socially responsible and high-quality development of scientific sciences and artistic disciplines and research areas and sub-areas developed by UM, taking into account the principles of smart specialisations with emphasis on solving societal challenges, is mainly connected with innovations, research projects and inclusion of students in these activities (by 2024 and 2025).</i></p>

University of Primorska	<i>No mention. (University of Primorska, 2020a; 2020b)</i>
University of Nova Gorica	<i>No document on the website. (University of Nova Gorica, n.d.a)</i>
University of Novo Mesto	<i>One of the strategic goals (University of Novo Mesto): Strengthening socially responsible action and constructive cooperation with the environment: opening up universities to the general public, networking with economic and non-economic actors, organising lectures for the interested public and professional associations; (University of Novo Mesto, 2020)</i>
New university	<i>One of the strategic goals in the Action plan for realising the vision and mission of the new university in the study year 2019/20 (New university 2020): Strengthen socially responsible and constructive cooperation with the broader domestic and foreign environment. The task that will allow the university to realise this goal: Increasing the involvement of the faculty in a scientific and professional environment (organisation of professional events intended for the general public). (New university, 2020a)</i>

Throughout the yearly evaluation’s process, universities have to write down self-evaluation reports (SER); that is why the expectations to find the newly emerged change in the environment, connected with social responsibility, were high. However, to the researchers' surprise, it was found only in one university’s SER, and in another one, it was mentioned briefly and superficially.

<b>university</b>	<b>text</b>
University of Ljubljana	<i>No mention. (University of Ljubljana, 2021)</i>
University of Maribor	<i>The Development Strategy of the University of Maribor 2013–2020 defines socially responsible enrolment planning as a strategic goal of educational activity at the University. Socially responsible enrolment planning includes activities to establish a system of long-term enrolment policy planning</i>

*based on the definition of the necessary prior knowledge and skills for successful study and analysis of enrolment conditions in the analysis of study programs at the University of Maribor. [...] Students are equal stakeholders. Together with the University of Maribor and employees, they develop the University under the principles of sustainable and socially responsible institutions and shape the mission, strategic orientations, and self-evaluation of higher education institutions and study programs and their change. [...] With the establishment of the University Press, the University of Maribor follows modern universities, which systematically creates conditions for the realisation of modern trends in scientific communication by promoting the socially responsible paradigm of open science. [...] In recent years, the University of Maribor paid much attention to raising awareness and acquainting the academic community with sustainable and socially responsible behaviour principles. Through the work of the Strategic Council and the Commission of the UM Senate for Sustainable and Socially Responsible University and the organisation of various activities (including participation in the organisation of the conference of the Institute for Social Responsibility), we assess that the academic community responsible behaviour and that the bodies of the University of Maribor, employees and students in their work take into account the principles of sustainable and socially responsible institutions or include them in their operations. The University of Maribor has also written its determination for sustainability and social responsibility in Article 2 of the UM Statute. [...] Following the UM Statute, the fundamental purpose of the UM Senate Commission for Sustainable and Socially Responsible University was to consider proposals for compliance with the principles of social responsibility in all activities of the University: teaching and learning and scientific and artistic work, management and control of all processes and systems and the University's cooperation with the environment at regional, national and international levels. During the Commission's operation, it was found that the Commission had carried out its mission through its work, which included information on sustainable and socially responsible development policies, as the Commission's purpose had been*

	<p><i>achieved by informing the university public. With policies of sustainable and socially responsible behaviour. It was assessed that at the institutional level, through various activities, the awareness of the importance of sustainability and social responsibility was internalised, so in 2020 the Commission abolished and its mission was integrated into the work of the remaining commissions of the UM Senate. [...] Aspects of sustainability and social responsibility are also part of the self-evaluation process at the University of Maribor; within which members evaluate other monitoring or care for sustainable development and the environment, promotion and own efforts to establish a green campus for energy efficiency, reduced water consumption and the promotion of sustainable transport.[...]</i></p> <p><i>The University of Maribor also has an educational centre for sustainable development and social responsibility, which provides experiential education for sustainable development (Learning ranges of the International Centre for Ecoremediation ERM at the Faculty of arts). The University of Maribor also participates in the international rankings of universities dealing with the environment, sustainability, and social responsibility (Greenmetric, Times Impact Ranking). The University regularly informs the public about e-news, social networks (Facebook, Twitter) and articles in the university newspaper UMniverzum about activities and innovations related to sustainable and socially responsible development. (University of Maribor, 2020b)</i></p>
<p>University of Primorska</p>	<p><i>No mention. (University of Primorska, 2020c)</i></p>
<p>University of Nova Gorica</p>	<p><i>No mention. (University of Nova Gorica, 2020)</i></p>
<p>University of Novo Mesto</p>	<p><i>No document on the website. (the University of Novo Mesto, n.d.)</i></p>
<p>New university</p>	<p><i>The new university organises scientific conferences, academic forums, in other events intended to strengthen the New university's social responsibility and creative cooperation with the domestic and foreign environment. (New university, 2020b)</i></p>

Another essential tool for universities' quality assurance and management are quality manuals, which usually contain requirements for the Quality management system, describing how the system works, planning, organising, leading, controlling, evaluation and improvement, and responsibilities. Sadly, most of the manuals we checked understand responsibility only as personal responsibility for delivering results on different tasks.

university	text
University of Ljubljana	<i>No mention. (University of Ljubljana, 2020)</i>
University of Maribor	<i>The UM Senate approved the Department for quality and sustainable development work program, which operates in the following areas: - quality monitoring, - development of quality and sustainable and socially responsible operation of the university at all areas, - [...] (University of Maribor 2016, 13)</i>
University of Primorska	<i>With the Code of Ethics adopted by the UP Senate in 2011, UP builds and maintains high professional and ethical standards of all UP employees, strengthens university affiliation, transparency and social responsibility for the operation of the university, freedom of research, teaching and learning, and the social reputation of UP. (University of Primorska 2019, 4)</i>
University of Nova Gorica	<i>No mention. (University of Nova Gorica, 2013)</i>
University of Novo Mesto	<i>No document on the website. (the University of Novo Mesto, n.d.)</i>
New university	<i>No mention. (New university, 2021)</i>

#### IV. Discussion

Of course, there is no legal obligation as to what certain university documents should contain; this is left to the autonomous regulation of the field of quality assurance. However, the national quality assurance agency requirements prescribe that the documents governing a university's quality assurance must be publicly available and published. Therefore, it is worrying that we have not found these documents on the websites of certain universities. A possible reason for the apology

in some cases is that a few private universities were established relatively recently and may not have been able to edit all the documentation on their websites yet. In the social responsibility issue, we summarised in the following table the inclusion and explanation of the term used in documents examined just for transparency.

university	mission	strategy	SER	manual
University of Ljubljana	N	X	N	N
University of Maribor	N	X	X	?
University of Primorska	N	N	N	X
University of Nova Gorica	N	0	N	N
University of Novo Mesto	N	?	0	0
New university	N	?	?	N

*Legend: X – present; ? – present superficially; 0 – no document found; N – not mentioned.*

It is pretty visible a clear distinction while addressing this issue at public and private universities. If public universities deal with and incorporate social responsibility in at least one document, private universities documents lack the transparent processing of this term and viewpoint. To understand the situation in Slovenia, it has to be said that private universities establishment followed the country's transition from socialist to the market economy. Typically, privately owned higher education institutions in Slovenia lack full-time staff; they primarily hire professors based on a contract to carry out the pedagogical process. Administrative staff are usually small and overburdened with many of the different tasks they have to perform.

The University of Maribor appears to have the most comprehensive, elaborated and updated quality assurance system; they are checking the compliance of their system through regular internal institutional and programme evaluations, including external evaluators. Internal institutional and program evaluations represent the preparation of the university and its faculties to external evaluations. At the same

time, the university gains an external/independent view of the achievement of the set goals and tests the effectiveness of the internal quality system on its faculties. This is an example of good practice that would be recommendable also for other institutions to follow. The social responsibility of the university and the approaches to its implementation are elaborated and presented in detail in their strategy and SER and mentioned in their quality manual. They understand their university as a socially responsible institution and implement it through: socially responsible enrolment planning; students' involvement in all the planning, evaluating, improving, organising and controlling activities; university's cooperation with the environment at regional, national and international levels; self-evaluation process, within which they evaluate care for sustainable development and the environment, promotion; efforts to establish a green campus for energy efficiency, reduced water consumption and the promotion of sustainable transport; educational centre for sustainable development and social responsibility; informing of public about their activities, and participation in the international rankings of universities dealing with the topics of environment and sustainability and social responsibility.

Other universities declare their involvement with social responsibility primarily as the careful planning and adjusting of the enrolment to the needs of the society and as informing the public about their achievements, which are essential for the sustainable development of the society. Due to the diverse definitions of social responsibility in the university setting, it is not up to us to judge which approach is better; despite this, it is evident that the University of Maribor demonstrates that social responsibility has been internalised and imbedded into their structure, processes and procedures, not only of quality assurance but into their every activity. It is correct to say that the omission of the term does not predict that other universities do not tackle issues connected with social responsibility. They might be worded differently or written in some other documents.

There is still enough room for improvement of Slovenian universities in this regard, if they would like to comply with the first two principles to strengthen their social dimension of the Rome ministerial communiqué – Annex II (EHEA 2020, 4) and make it publicly available: "The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at the system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level", and "Legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies." Goals could be set for complete access, support participation, and allow students to complete their studies. Inclusive university strategies could be designed through a dialogue between all stakeholders to advance diversity and equity, approachable to the broader community needs. Universities are expected to offer both part-time and full-time studies, versatile study styles, distance and blended learning, and recognition of previous learning to fit in with the diverse student population needs.

## V. Conclusions

Social responsibility appeared on the EHEA political agenda due to changes in society and the universities' environment. Universities should strive to identify, define and finally implement the needed requirements to fulfil their social responsibility. Social responsibility makes an integral element of excellence in education and research quality. Furthermore, since the European higher education area (EHEA) principles aim to open, competitive and congruent space for students, scholars and other stakeholders, universities have to strive continuously to improve the quality of their teaching and research. However, there is more to that than the usual ranking and comparison of their achievements. Universities are the engines of society's development and moving away from Humboldt's ideal of the university as (Arai et al. 2007, 804) "intimately intertwined research and education under one roof, giving students direct access to the leading researchers and thinkers of the time", could bring unimaginable consequences. The mass enrolment of young people in universities, the reduction of university funding in most countries due to various crises and the prevailing neoliberal worldview raise the question of whether the traditional view of the university role is still relevant. Alternative models that offer distancing from teaching and publicly funded research through links with business to attract funding force universities to secure their research intellectual property; some critics fear, these phenomena might endanger "the intellectual independence of universities" (Oehmke 2005, 3) and their social involvement (Gulbrandsen and Smeby 2005, 932). Apple (2001) criticises neoliberalism's claims about how the harmonisation, marketisation, privatisation, and generally the globalisation of educational systems improve the educational quality, as significant findings demonstrate "that the expansion of higher education happens in tandem with the increase of income inequality and the aggravation of racial, gender and class differences" (Kromydas, 2017).

Universities have to carry out all the necessary activities to monitor and ensure the quality of their operation, following the requirements of accountability and responsibility to different publics and plan and implement the assurance processes of continuous internal improvement. It does not matter whether they are public or private; the quality has no colour and no political sign. Issuing diplomas on the fast track should not be the only university's priority, disregarding other open quality assurance questions. Perceived and recognised quality of the gained diploma and the acquired knowledge opens many doors to graduates looking for work. However, the broader values reflected by the university are also an infallible part of the university's offer and operation. Presenting and informing the public about these values and institutions' activities enables the acquaintance and dissemination of positive opinions and increases the university's reputation at home and around the world. Students and other university stakeholders should be seen as buyers of educational and research services and as essential co-creators of the quality content in diverse university activities. Effective environmental care with climate stability, biodiversity and the restoration of natural resources require examining how institutions organise

social, economic and political activities relevant to their surroundings and ensure the restoration of natural resources for future generations. Because we are aware of how important it is for employees and students to acquire knowledge and information about working according to the principles of a sustainable and socially responsible institution, universities must include these contents in the educational process. The university must remain the core and symbol of social responsibility, open dialogue, academic affiliation, study and research excellence.

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# Cultural and Creative Higher Education and the Fourth Industrial Revolution<sup>1</sup>

*Grzegorz Kurzyński*

*Professor  
K. Lipiński Academy of Music  
in Wrocław, Poland  
grzkurz@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** *Every two or three years, there are meetings of ministers responsible for the countries' higher education that participate in the Bologna Process - and there are already 48 of them. The results of these meetings are Communiqués (statements) regarding new steps and activities within the European Higher Education Area.*

*The Bologna Follow-up Group, which supervises the progress of the Bologna Process in the periods between ministerial meetings, implements the decisions contained in individual Communiqués and proposes the new activities for the coming years. In the last BFUG report, BFUG work on vision and thematic priorities after 2020 the text was partially determined by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its premises – robotics, artificial intelligence and digitization. In my article, I am trying to answer how Higher Music Education responds to the challenges of these new circumstances.*

**Keywords:** *Music, AEC, MusiQuE, Polifonia, Fourth Industrial Revolution*

**Rezumat:** *La fiecare doi sau trei ani, există reuniuni ale miniștrilor responsabili pentru instituțiile de învățământ superior din țările care participă la Procesul de la Bologna - și există deja 48 dintre acestea. Aceste reuniuni sunt sub formă de Comunicate (declarații) privind noi etape și activități în cadrul Spațiului European al Învățământului Superior.*

*Grupul de monitorizare de la Bologna, care supraveghează progresul Procesului de la Bologna în perioadele dintre reuniunile ministeriale, pune în aplicare deciziile cuprinse în comunicatele individuale și propune noile activități pentru următorii ani. În ultimul raport BFUG, textul BFUG lucrează la viziune și priorități tematice după 2020 a fost parțial determinat de cea de-a patra revoluție industrială și de premisele sale – robotică, inteligență artificială și digitalizare. În articolul curent, am încercat să răspund la modul în care Învățământul Superior Muzical răspunde la provocările acestor noi circumstanțe.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Muzică, AEC, MusiQuE, Polifonie, A 4-a Revoluție Industrială*

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<sup>1</sup> This article is partially based on the text edited by the Bologna Follow-up Group BFUG WORK ON VISION AND THEMATIC PRIORITIES AFTER 2020 - Summary of the current state of affairs (June 2019).

The fundamental question is how Higher Education will respond to the requirements of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (a term that appeared for the first time at the Hannover Fair in 2011) regarding a world that will increasingly depend on robotics artificial intelligence and digitization<sup>2</sup>. By introducing new technologies and areas related to digitization, robotics and artificial intelligence, it is expected that about 50 new professions will appear in the coming years, and many more will disappear. Consequently, people probably will have numerous different jobs in the future, and they will have to be prepared for them. It will require many 'smaller pieces' of learning in the form of specific modules or short programmes offered by the universities to update or enhance their existing knowledge and competencies.

Furthermore, now it is the role of the Universities to raise learners awareness that graduation does not mean completing their learning: they must be prepared to become self-guided learners. They must understand the importance of lifelong learning and training instead of one-time learning/training followed by employment. It means that people will not go through a single degree programme and expect to be employed for life in a single career path.

Since the specific skills, competencies and knowledge needed in the future are uncertain, curricula will need to be frequently revised and updated. Universities will need to adapt rapidly and form broad sets of competencies for a very diverse group of students. Flexibility will be a keyword, and it must be seen in different ways: programmes need to be more flexible to adapt to societal changes and a greater diversity of students.

To meet the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, universities will need to take specific actions on foresight and planning. After the Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting (held in Bucharest in April 2019), the following conclusions and premises have been articulated:

The first premise is to increase the social role of higher education and demonstrate that it provides tangible benefits to society. Universities should work to increase public understanding of their role and importance and ensure that they actually provide benefits for society.

The second premise is to expand the accessibility of higher education - universities should focus on the needs of all learners, regardless of their origin (this also applies to migratory movement), social status and age. This requires the delivery of more flexible and diverse education programmes.

Finally, the third premise, closely related to the second, is the introduction of innovative, flexible and relevant ways of learning and teaching.

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<sup>2</sup> The first industrial revolution used water and steam to mechanize production (the end of the eighteenth century), the second used electric energy to create mass production (late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century) and the third used electronics and information technology to automate production (1970s); the fourth is the age of the disappearance of the barriers between people and machines (second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century).

These are the three main topics and principal social responsibilities of Higher Education. Of course, quality of teaching and learning is essential, but quality assurance mechanisms may constitute a barrier to innovation in program design. We should address this contradiction by analyzing current regulations, standards, and guidelines and ensuring that the quality assurance mechanisms help respond to new and different types of requirements.

There is another danger: in a world that starts to be increasingly dependent on robotics, artificial intelligence and digitization, the premises of the Fourth Industrial Revolution bring the threat of dehumanization. Digitization should not change the deepest premise of higher education, which is its human dimension. We need to take action to face this risk. Furthermore, here art plays an important role: fulfilling to a large extent the premises and guidelines of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, art can serve as a specific moderator in the ongoing activities.

In what direction is music going? Technology and digitization now enable an entirely new approach to the musical matter. Nevertheless, we cannot neglect the current formula of student education based on classical music because it represents the essence of our cultural heritage. Nevertheless, we are in the period of the digital revolution; previous innovative trends in music - Serialism, Punctualism, Aphoristic music, Bruithism, Concrete music, Aleatoric music, Stochastic music, Microtone music, Minimal music, Spectral music and the instruments used in them are becoming a thing of the past, replaced by entirely new instruments offered by electronics. An example of Stanford University (one of the foremost universities in the world, and its music department, especially electronic music, is one of the leaders in the world) proves that possibilities arising from it are enormous.

The Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC), a European cultural and educational network founded in 1953, and now associating almost 300 professional music training institutions from 57 countries in Europe, and also in US, Asia, South America and Australia, plays a leading role in the development of music in Higher Music Education in Europe. The main aims of AEC are to promote European cooperation in higher music education and address European issues. AEC has had programmes in Socrates, Erasmus-Mundus, EU/USA, eContent – distant learning, Culture 2000, Leonardo, Erasmus+ and Full Score. The main office of the AEC is in Brussels.

In the frame of AEC has been established Polifonia - the European Thematic Network for music. 55 higher music institutions from 26 European countries and four countries outside Europe (Australia, Canada, USA and Hong Kong) contributed to 'Polifonia' as official project partners and participated in its activity. Now Polifonia does not exist, but its 3 European Platforms are still working: Early Music Platform, Jazz and Pop Platform, European Platform for Artistic Research in Music (EPARM).

In November 2015, at the annual AEC Congress in Glasgow, AEC identified three themes that reflected its core values in the new Strategic Plan for 2016 – 2020.

These are summed up in the Plan's title: 'Pursuing Quality; Sharing Knowledge; Strengthening Partnerships'. As a part of the new AEC' Strategic Plan has also presented a new project entitled FULL SCORE reflecting its overall aim of "FULfilling the Skills, COmpetences and know-how REquirements of cultural and creative players in the European music sector". FULL SCORE promotes *quality* in the education delivered to musicians (giving them the best skills and competencies), spreads *knowledge* relating to that quality (helping in the sharing of these skills and competencies) and strengthens *partnership* (involving a range of stakeholders in helping to define the skills and competencies required for the future).

Other FULL SCORE' topics were also important:

- to set up an online platform for application and administration of exchange and mobility activities;
- to create a common European platform for advertising job vacancies for instrumental and vocal musicians and composers;
- AEC will engage young musicians in sharing their views about how best to facilitate their access to professional opportunities and engage with contemporary audiences.
- to take a leading role in developing a European Agenda for Music, together with the European Music Council (EMC).

European Agenda for Music was a proposal of the European Music Council. The main goal of this initiative was to constitute a platform that brings together the whole music sector to allow stakeholders to participate more effectively and with one voice in European cultural policy-making. Working in close cooperation with the European Association for Music in Schools (EAS) and the European Music School Union (EMU) under its project 'FULL SCORE', the AEC offered to jointly coordinate work on that part of the Agenda which deals with music education. As part of this work, AEC, EAS and EMU committed to consulting their respective members about the priorities to be addressed in the European Agenda for Music: what should be in it and how it should be constructed and, eventually, used.

It was also stated that AEC would ensure a full and effective engagement of conservatoire leaders in the development of a European Agenda for Music that seeks:

- to stimulate musical creativity and creation;
- to improve the circulation of European repertoire and the mobility of artists throughout Europe;
- to support musical diversity and ensure music education for all;
- to strengthen the recognition of the societal value of music;
- to reach out to new audiences and develop new publics.

Another essential element of AEC activity was establishing an independent European subject-specific review body for higher music education institutions and programmes - MusiQuE. The program of MusiQuE is dedicated to the continuous improvement of the quality of higher music education across Europe and beyond and assisting higher music education institutions in their enhancement of quality.

The AEC Quality Enhancement Committee, with the help of the 'Polifonia' Working Group on Quality Enhancement, Accreditation and Benchmarking, worked since 2011 on bringing AEC to the point where it was ready to launch this body. As a result, the statutes establishing MusiQuE – were signed by AEC president Pascale De Groote in The Hague on 7 October 2014.

This step had enormous significance for AEC because it moved the responsibility for the AEC institutional and programme reviews to an independent external review body – MusiQuE.

MusiQuE offers a range of reviews and accreditation processes tailored to the needs of Higher Music Education institutions:

- Quality enhancement processes for institutions, programmes and joint programmes;
- Independent accreditation procedures for institutions, programmes and joint programmes;
- Joint procedures with national quality assurance and accreditation agencies.

The process of the evaluation procedure is very similar to processes conducted by national Accreditation Agencies: preparation of self-evaluation report, an onsite visit of 1.5 to 3 days by the international peer-reviewers (at least four persons, including a student), accompanied by a secretary. The outcome is either an advisory report highlighting good practices and including a set of recommendations or a report that concludes with a formal recommendation to award accreditation.

The areas to be reviewed are as follows:

- Mission, vision and context
- Educational processes
- Student profiles
- Teaching staff
- Facilities, resources and support
- Communication, organisation and decision-making processes
- Internal quality culture
- Public interaction

After the accreditation visits, one recommendation is very important in the conclusions of many reports: greater emphasis should be placed on developing "soft" skills. As part of the "broadly defined education," it is essential to focus on accomplishing various types of generic outcomes: graduates will need such competencies as critical thinking, creativity and the ability for autonomous learning, instead flexibility, teamwork and leadership skills, communication skills and skills related to digital technologies. In the assessment process, too much attention tends to be paid to practical outcomes and too little to academic and generic outcomes (social competencies). Although the so-called technical (practical) skills are essential, the AEC Learning Outcomes and the "musical version" of Dublin Descriptors also provide for some theoretical and generic learning outcomes. Therefore, creativity,

the ability to independently integrate the acquired knowledge and take new and comprehensive activities in an organised way, and the use of psychological mechanisms that support taking action should be appreciated and evaluated. Students should be more prepared for a rapidly changing world. Knowledge should be seen in a context that includes ethical dimensions. The broader role of education in shaping character and transmitting values, not just content, should always be considered.

Creating and implementing new solutions and innovative approaches that European universities have identified as helpful in their work requires:

- taking measures aimed at establishing new programmes and specialisations, in particular, those of an interdisciplinary (inter-university) character;
- developing student-centred curricula, i.a., by enabling students to shape their learning pathways;
- consolidating measures taken by various faculties to improve their cooperation, in order to make broader and more diverse use of the academic staff (inter-faculty classes, combinations of knowledge dissemination methods, increased flexibility), and discussing the Academy's curricula at the inter-faculty level aimed at a better integration of the curricula offered by various units within the Institution (faculties, institutes, chairs, departments, etc.);
- enabling students to gradually synthesize and develop the ability to practically use the disseminated knowledge, which appears crucial given the emerging needs of the labour market;
- preparing students for an international career: a portfolio career and/or travelling career, and familiarizing them with subjects related to copyright, tax law, fundamentals of marketing and administration – better tailored to the modern labour market;
- introducing new learning methods: Tutoring, Design thinking, Problem-based learning, Case learning, Flipped education and Peer learning;
- further developing the e-learning methods;
- developing well-balanced curricula, comprehensive but not overloaded, flexible and progressive, and student-centred and oriented to the learning process.

In the context of the initiative of the European Commission regarding the creation of *Creative Europe - Cultural and Creative Higher Education*, the graduates of our artistic academies will be the leading players in the future – that is why they have to be equipped with the best skills, competencies and *know-how* requirements.

## FIDES FACIT FIDEM<sup>1</sup>: Building Trust-Based QA through Supportive Communication and Transparency

*Serhiy Kvit*

*Head of National Agency for Higher  
Education Quality Assurance, Ukraine  
kvit@naqa.gov.ua*

*Nataliia Stukalo*

*Vice-Head of National Agency for Higher  
Education Quality Assurance, Ukraine  
nstukalo@ukr.net ; nstukalo@naqa.gov.ua*

**Abstract:** *Maintaining trust among all quality assurance (QA) process participants is critically important in emergency QA systems, especially during crisis times. Supportive communication and transparency are essential tools of QA to develop trustworthy relations of QA Agencies with the stakeholders. This qualitative study discusses how supportive communication and transparency contribute to trust-building and maintaining and the fundamental principles and factors of the QA Agency trustworthiness. There is a discussion of the Ukrainian case of two-years transition from an 'old' accreditation system lacking confidence to a trust-based QA system. Some good practices of supportive communication in QA during the global pandemic 2020 are presented. NAQA case study and questionnaire are used to conduct this study. It is concluded that transparency policy, social media tools and projects, webinars, Q&A sessions, open communication play a crucial role in QA when there is a lack of trust in the academic environment and face-to-face communication is not available.*

**Keywords:** *quality assurance, trust, supportive communication, transparency, Ukraine, good practices of supportive communication*

**Rezumat:** *Menținerea încrederii în rândul tuturor participanților la procesul de asigurare a calității (AC) este extrem de importantă în sistemele de asigurare a calității, în special în perioadele de criză. Comunicarea suport și transparența sunt instrumente esențiale ale AC, necesare creării unor relații de încredere ale agențiilor de AC cu părțile interesate. Acest studiu calitativ prezintă modul în care comunicarea suport și transparența contribuie la consolidarea și menținerea încrederii, precum și principiile și factorii fundamentali ai încrederii în Agențiile de AC. Este prezentat cazul Ucrainei, de tranziție pe o perioadă de doi ani de la un sistem de acreditare vechi, lipsit de încredere, la un sistem de AC bazat pe încredere. Sunt prezentate câteva bune practici de comunicare suport în AC, din*

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<sup>1</sup> From Latin “Trust creates Trust”

*timpul pandemiei globale din 2020. Studiul de caz NAQA și chestionarul sunt utilizate pentru a realiza cercetarea. S-a concluzionat că politica de transparență, instrumentele și proiectele de comunicare socială, webinarile, sesiunile de întrebări și răspunsuri, comunicarea deschisă joacă un rol crucial în AC atunci când există o lipsă de încredere în mediul academic, iar comunicarea față în față nu este disponibilă.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** asigurarea calității, încredere, comunicare suport, transparență, Ucraina, bune practice de comunicare suport

## Introduction

The emerging quality assurance (QA) systems are often characterized by a lack of trust among the participants of the QA process. The initial absence of consistent and reliable QA and the 'old' formal approach to accreditations in such systems caused huge mutual mistrust both at the institutional level (government mistrusted academia and, in response, academia mistrusted government) and within the academic environment. Besides, at the initial stage of the QA standards implementation, the level of trust also remained relatively low because of new regulations, procedures, and challenges in new standards completion, lack of understanding of the new approach and past dependence in the perception of the educational innovations.

Global pandemic 2020 caused additional pressure on such emerging quality assurance systems due to abnormal changes in teaching and learning and external and internal QA of higher education (HE). An unprecedented level of uncertainty impacts Universities and HE stakeholders, making them look for additional support and guidance. Our recent research (Stukalo, 2020) has demonstrated that the role of QA Agencies has been extended during emerging situations. Consultative, supportive and practice-sharing functions are becoming more significant, implemented at the meta-level and applicable locally, nationally and internationally. However, these functions can be efficiently implemented only with relevant communication tools. Effective and open communication during pandemic builds trust, which 'is imperative in a crisis' (Reynolds and Quinn, 2008).

## Study Aim and Research Questions

This study aims to enhance concepts of supportive communication and transparency as essential functions of QA in emerging systems and emergencies to maintain trustworthy relations between QA Agencies, the stakeholders and the whole society. The research questions to be answered as a result of this study: What does the concept of supportive communication mean in quality assurance, and how does it contribute to trust-building? What are the fundamental principles and factors of the QA Agency trustworthiness? What are good practices of supportive communication and transparency in emerging QA systems and during the global pandemic 2020?

## **Research Methodology**

This qualitative research is based on the case study and questionnaire methods. First, the case of Ukraine and the Ukrainian National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA) is analyzed. This research also considers two questionnaires on NAQA communication strategy: the first - for NAQA experts and the second - for HE institutions' representatives. As a result of questionnaires distribution, 646 responses of experts and 521 responses of HE institutions representatives are collected by NAQA and used in this study. Besides, some publicly available materials on the same experience of the international QA networks are also used.

## **Background of the Issue: the Case of Distrust to 'Old' Accreditation System in Ukraine**

Before 2019 when the new regulations on quality assurance aligned to ESG-2015 were adopted, officially, the accreditation process looked quite transparent and accessible. It was regulated by the State Accreditation Requirements (2012) and envisaged compliance with the Licensing Conditions (2011) through self-analysis and expert assessment. Such parameters defined the quality of higher education as available highly qualified personnel, physical and technical infrastructure, teaching, learning, and informational support, and a positive trend (towards an increase) in the number of students. In practice, everything was upside down and full of problems. Accreditation requirements were unrealistically high and based on quantitative indicators only. They were pettily extra-detailed and unified without regard to the nature of different HEIs, the features of study programs (specializations) in different training areas or regional contexts. That model allowed only influential universities that received enough resources from the state for institutional development to pass accreditation successfully.

Those requirements were excessive for smaller-scale, provincial, and private educational institutions. So, they were forced to look for informal ways of settling accreditation issues. It was a common practice when experts, especially members of Sectoral Expert Councils (in specific fields of knowledge), assessed a study program from the standpoint of their educational institution or considered it exclusively as a potential competitor. As a result, that approach pushed towards monopolization of the market of educational services and depreciation of institutional development to ensure the quality of higher education.

Correctly prescribed on paper but insensitive to the demands of the time and actual needs of the higher education system, the quantitative analysis criteria would push university administrations towards "double-standard moral" as a way to survive. On the one hand, non-compliance with the requirements set by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MES) would entail the loss of license and shutdown of the educational program (specialization) but, on the other hand, compliance with the requirements would make it economically unfeasible and overall unattractive

for students. For example, it was not permitted to hire professionals with practical experience to teach if they had no academic degree in a particular field.

The ratio of instructors to students remained one of the most unreachable and at the same time invariable regulations under the accreditation algorithm in the past. Furthermore, a real challenge for HEIs was created with the inconsistencies between regulatory documents, which resulted in their different interpretations by the Ministry officials.

State officials who were "assigned" to supervise certain accreditation cases and regarded "in charge" of their registration and preparation for accreditation.

And finally – their selective implementation. The lack of information, methodology support, and essential transparency made academic integrity virtually impossible. Even final decisions (including regulatory ones) or minutes of the meetings of the accreditation bodies were considered confidential.

The main task of HEIs representatives was to formalize the "accreditation file properly". However, the imposed requirements often looked vague. Any consultations with "specialists" were exclusively private. Due to the lack of a single agreed interpretation of the existing requirements, which were full of contradictions, several parallel approaches could have emerged within an accreditation institution. So, a logical solution to all the problems used to be to seek communication with an MES specialist (who, as we can see, had their own "unique interpretation") assigned to a particular university.

Because of the detected technical drawbacks or inconsistencies (which were usually quite frequent under those circumstances), an accreditation file would not be registered and bounced back to the university, and the accreditation procedure would be postponed for an indefinite period. To prepare and formalize an accreditation file, it was necessary to collect many paper documents and certificates. A thoroughly prepared file could be rejected due to petty objections to its design (size of the margins or fonts). One way or another, all that prompted informal relations between HEIs and accreditation "specialists".

The appointment of experts for accreditation was not systematic. The main task of HEIs was to obtain informal approval of the educational program (specialization) by the Ministry of Education and Science. In practice, it would mean reaching an agreement and attaining a favourable decision from the experts. HEIs representatives could have a preliminary agreement with familiar individuals who would later be approved as experts to assess a particular degree program.

There were cases when the same experts would be "present" on the same day in different HEIs (in different regions of Ukraine), which meant that sometimes they would not physically appear in a particular university for accreditation expertise procedure. The experts were not subject to centralized selection under objective and pre-announced requirements.

One cannot say that the system did not work, but it cannot be considered efficient either. Professional experts were also involved in the process. At the same time,

no special training of experts was required, and their field visits were not duly regulated. Due to the favourable treatment of some (large public) universities, the accreditation requirements were not objective. Some accreditation files were reviewed in detail, typically if the entire academic community was already aware of the problems or received reasoned complaints against those universities.

Those mentioned above may give a mistaken impression that no real consultations on improving the quality of educational programs or expert help, sharing experience, and best practices existed at all. Academic communities saw how absurd, over-bureaucratized, and oppressive that kind of accreditation system was. Quite often, during an experts' visit, a sincere and constructive conversation would occur in informal settings, a trust-based relationship would be established. However, the experts would only issue a formalized response under official settings, which showed a low level of trust in the existing procedures and institutions.

Accordingly, the internal quality assurance system was reduced to administering the so-called "Rector's tests", which were supposed to assess the level of "residual knowledge" (the knowledge that a student had acquired by attending previous courses and which had already been assessed by course examinations). This technology was also part of the accreditation procedures when experts were visiting HEIs. Some well-established Soviet norms, such as regular peer attending classes within a department, were generally ignored in post-Soviet Ukraine.

Most importantly, accreditation was not viewed in the context of external quality assurance. As a result, no understanding was there either of the importance of developing an original internal academic culture in higher education institutions, mutual balanced demands, and integrity, which should have cultivated the quality of learning, teaching, and scientific research. Both concepts emerged in Ukraine when drafting the "Law on Higher Education", primarily during 2012, which the Parliament approved immediately after the 2014 Revolution of Dignity (Kvit, 2020).

In 2015, a National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was expected to start functioning. However, that did not happen partly due to objective reasons: the Law on Higher Education (2014) contains neither specific requirements for NAQA members nor a specific election procedure. Also, there was a long list of those who wanted to take control of accreditation processes seeming to be "falling off" the hands of the Ministry as part of the national decentralization policy and implementation of university autonomy.

After relevant legislative changes in 2017, the International Competition Commission was formed, and the new composition of NAQA was selected and approved. The official launch of NAQA was in February 2019 after the Cabinet of Ministers approval of the NAQA Head and Vice-Heads.

So, in February 2019, NAQA started developing and implementing a new QA policy and system in the environment of distrust and non-perception of accreditation in the academic sphere and was also challenged by society incredulity. Moreover, the critical issue was raised at the first NAQA meeting – how to build trust in the QA system?

## **Supportive communication and transparency for building trust in QA**

Supportive communication is considered helpful given verbally and nonverbally in stressful, emergency and uncertain situations. This topic is mainly investigated at the individual and psychological levels. However, some studies are devoted to effective communication in organizations (Rajhans, 2018). In this study, we consider supportive communication as a part of organizational culture in the form of comprehensive help and guidance given by an organization to all stakeholders internally and externally. Supportive communication importance may rise during emerging situations. However, the author believes that it can be effective only if it is a part of organizational culture regardless of the times and circumstances and based on organizational values.

Management theory argues another essential tool for trust-building - transparency which is considered "a function of information disclosure, clarity, and accuracy" (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson, 2014). Any organization, especially those which are recently launched and experienced rapid growth, is recommended to have a transparency strategy, including concrete mechanisms to manage transparency perceptions and information for deliberate changes in transparency.

So, the NAQA decision was to develop the QA system based on openness, transparency, partnership, professionalism, trust (NAQA, 2019).

## **Results and Findings**

The QA plays an important societal role and impacts Universities and the whole HE system. The QA Agencies' and networks' role is enhanced under emergency circumstances, and they demonstrate leadership, supportiveness and openness to ensure the same high level of education quality during pandemic (Stukalo, 2020). Its apparent positive communication is essential for relationships among stakeholders and building trustworthiness in the QA process.

The analysis of the NAQA questionnaire and the observation of the QA Networks websites have resulted in the following findings:

Firstly, the trustworthiness of the QA Agency starts with being approachable and friendly in communication with stakeholders. For instance, QA Networks and Agencies are easily reachable via social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn. According to the NAQA's recent experts survey, only 2% of respondents think communication with NAQA is problematic. NAQA was officially launched only in February 2019 and regularly monitored the stakeholders' satisfaction with NAQA communication. Experts surveys demonstrate that communication with NAQA has significantly improved within the last year. In December 2019, 11% of experts mentioned communication with NAQA as one of the problems in the QA process. In February 2020 – 7%, and in August 2020, only 2% of experts identified communication as a problem (NAQA, 2020).

Secondly, accountability and trustworthiness are based on honesty and openness. For example, the NAQA's fundamental values are trust, openness, reliability and

transparency (NAQA, 2019). The major NAQA's activities are transparent and final decisions on accreditation are made publicly. NAQA has established an online accreditation platform with a publicly available list of all accreditation decisions and suggestions for improvement ([www.public.naqa.gov.ua](http://www.public.naqa.gov.ua)). NAQA encourages open and honest dialogue among all participants of the external QA process and considers arguments.

Thirdly, the QA Agency's policy should be consistent, aligned to values and organizational culture. Keeping commitments and doing what you say is the basis of organizational culture and play a crucial role regarding confidence deserving. In the NAQA case, the accreditation process and communication strategy are built on the values presented in the strategy (NAQA, 2019). It is communicated to the public how decision-making reflects it.

Last but not least, showing support is decisive for trust maintaining, significantly when circumstances are changing in emergency times. In QA, support is reflected through explaining, suggesting, guiding. Covid-19 caused a lack of face-to-face communication, so QA Networks and Agencies have quickly switched to an online format in their procedures and communication. For instance, ENQA has conducted a series of webinars, INQAAHE's, CEENQA's, CHEA's thematic webinars have also become regular. In addition, NAQA has established such communication projects as NAQA School of Quality, NAQA\_Recommends, NAQA\_Comments, NAQA's Q&A Sessions, NAQA Webinars. These projects are conducted through social media on a weekly and biweekly basis and provide experts, universities representatives, and the other stakeholders with guidelines, recommendations, explanations, best practices sharing. 77% of respondents consider social media communication effective and use it regularly; 91% of respondents are mostly (36%) or entirely (55%) informed about the NAQA's activities and communication projects.

Implementing the policy of supportive communication and transparency has resulted in significant improvements in the quality assurance system in Ukraine. The analytical report resulting from the project supported by the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine (Фініков і Терешук, 2020) confirms significant progress in internal quality assurance system in the Ukrainian Universities within two years after the NAQA's official launch.

## Conclusions

The current practice is evidence of transparent, sustaining, and innovative ways of communication of QA institutions and networks towards the key stakeholders. Supportive communication is characterized by honesty, initiative, consistency, accountability, dedication and commitment. Such communication style is based on credibility, reliability and engenders the academic public's trust, which is imperative in emergencies. So, the study's main contribution lies in arguing QA Agencies supportive communication and transparency with stakeholders as a basis for maintaining trust in emerging QA systems and during emergency times. Social

media tools, webinars, Q&A sessions, open communication play a crucial role when distrust in society or face-to-face communication is not available. There is evidence that the value of trust, openness, transparency created an atmosphere of trust and understanding among the academic society - FIDES FACIT FIDEM (trust creates the trust).

The study could be helpful to QA Agencies, and the other stakeholders as the supportive communication framework could be implemented to maintain trust and build effective relationships. The limitation of this study is focused on the single organization– NAQA. It could be conducted in multiple case studies as an area for further research.

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# Criteria for Assessing the Quality of Higher Education in Bulgaria

*Eleonora Mileva*

*Professor, Dr.,  
National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski",  
Bulgaria*

*emileva2002@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** *The National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) of Bulgaria regulates the accreditation process of higher educational institutions in the country. The Standing Committees by areas of higher education are also involved. The main activities of NEAA are connected with institutional accreditation, programme accreditation and evaluation of projects. Standards and criteria for the accreditation of higher schools in Bulgaria are adopted. Another important document is the Code of Ethics. The National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" (NSA) is among the universities with the highest accreditation ratings given by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency.*

**Keywords:** *institution, quality of education, accreditation, criteria, professional field*

**Rezumat:** *Agenția Națională de Evaluare și Acreditare (ANEA) din Bulgaria reglementează procesul de acreditare a instituțiilor de învățământ superior din țară. Sunt implicate, de asemenea, comitetele permanente pe domenii de învățământ superior. Principalele activități ale ANEA sunt legate de acreditarea instituțională, acreditarea programelor și evaluarea proiectelor. Sunt adoptate standarde și criterii pentru acreditarea școlilor superioare din Bulgaria. Un alt document important este Codul de etică. Academia Națională de Sport "Vassil Levski" (ANS) se numără printre universitățile cu cele mai ridicate ratinguri de acreditare acordate de Agenția Națională de Evaluare și Acreditare.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *instituție, calitatea educației, acreditare, criterii, domeniu profesional*

## Introduction

Bulgaria made decisive steps in European integration of higher education by signing the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process 2021, available at: <https://www.ehea.info/>). One of the most important consequences for higher education is the impact of the Bologna Process on the management and quality of higher education. Placed in conditions of increased

competition, the universities must offer high-quality modern teaching and attractive programmes to enrol more students. This has a positive effect on employers, the business community and the labor market.

The most critical dimensions of the process of European integration in the field of higher education can be outlined in the following way (Mileva 2012, 22):

- Building a system for comparability and recognition of professional qualifications.
- Introduction of the European system of educational credits (ECTS).
- Implementation of the Erasmus academic exchange programme.
- Development of systems for assessing the quality of the educational process.

The adoption of the European Qualifications Framework in 2008 (EQF 2008) has a significant effect on the recognition of Bulgarian higher education qualifications in the European educational area. Under the influence of the mentioned processes, in 2002, the Bulgarian Classifier of the fields of higher education and professional directions came into force, introducing the generally accepted international educational fields and directions as a reference point for the bachelor programs (Classifier of the fields of higher education and professional directions, available at: <https://legislation.apis.bg/doc/15501/0>). The Classifier includes 9 areas of higher education and 52 professional fields, mainly in line with the UNESCO-ISCE-97 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCE 1997).

In February 2012, the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Bulgaria (NQF) was adopted, covering the entire education system and all qualifications in it (NQF 2012). It includes nine levels, incl. zero (preparatory) level. Thus, comparing the national strategies for higher education with the unified qualification framework positively impacts the social realization of the different categories of professionals within the European Union.

## **The Educational System in Bulgaria**

The higher education system in Bulgaria is dynamic and is constantly changing and developing in terms of the structure of universities, curricula, educational management, funding and several other structural elements.

One of the main trends is related to the significant expansion of specialities within higher education institutions and their transformation into institutions of the university type. In addition, increasing competition and the dynamics of social development give rise to the need for continuous diversification of the product of the offered educational services. At the same time, there is a growing interest in various forms of continuing or lifelong learning like distance learning, training and qualification courses, or other activities after a basic Bachelor's degree (Tasheva, Pavlov 2000).

Higher education in Bulgaria is regulated by the Higher Educational Act, adopted in 1995 with numerous amendments until 2020 (Higher Educational Act 2020, available at: <https://www.mon.bg/bg/57>). This law regulates the structure,

functions, management and financing of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria. According to Article 2 of the Act, "the purpose of higher education is the training of highly qualified specialists above secondary education and the development of science and culture" (Higher Educational Act 2020).

Higher education institutions in Bulgaria are public and private, and the National Assembly regulates their establishment and closure. Higher education is acquired only in higher schools, which have received accreditation by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) and have been established under conditions and by order, determined by the Higher Educational Act (Article 5). There are 52 accredited higher education institutions in Bulgaria; 38 of them are public, and 14 are private.

Higher education institutions in Bulgaria ensure the quality of education and scientific research through "an internal system for assessing and maintaining the quality of education and academic staff, which includes a survey of students' opinion at least once in the school year" (Higher Educational Act 2020, Article 6, paragraph 4).

The system of higher education in Bulgaria organizes courses of study after secondary school graduation and consists of the following educational degrees:

1. Bachelor - with a minimum term of preparation according to the curriculum of 4 years (240 credits).
2. Master - with a minimum term of preparation of not less than five years or one year after obtaining the degree "Bachelor" (from 60 to 120 credits).
3. Doctor - with a minimum term of preparation of 3 years after obtaining the degree of "Master". The respective higher school determines the number of credits in the doctoral programmes depending on the professional field, speciality, and education goals.

### **The Accreditation Process of Higher Education Institutions in Bulgaria**

An essential point in the Higher Educational Act in Bulgaria is the accreditation of higher education institutions, which is a process of recognition by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) of the right of higher education institutions to provide higher education through educational qualifications in specific academic fields, professional fields and specialities by assessing the quality of various activities (Higher Educational Act 2020).

The activities of NEAA aim to stimulate and control higher education institutions, ensure and improve the quality of their education, and conduct it in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (amended State Gazette 2020, 17).

The National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency of Bulgaria was founded according to Article 11, paragraph 1 of the Higher Educational Act, passed by the National Assembly on December 27, 1995 (National Evaluation and Accreditation

Agency 2021, available at: <https://www.neaa.government.bg/>). The statute of NEAA and subordinate legislative background of the Agency was constituted with a Decree of the Council of Ministers of August 1, 1996.

The first Accreditation Council started its work by the end of 1996. However, due to lack of experience in the area of higher education evaluation and accreditation in Bulgaria, the primary approach in the process of establishing the Agency and elaborating the required documentation was studying the international experience and best practices, correlating them to the specifics, conditions and traditions of the Bulgarian higher education to find the best system suitable for the Bulgarian Education Area.

With the enforcement of the amendments of the Higher Educational Act on June 4, 2004, some changes occurred in the evaluation and accreditation procedures of higher education institutions, imposing on NEAA the functions of a specialized governmental body for carrying out evaluation, accreditation and quality control in the activities of higher education institutions and carrying out post-accreditation monitoring and control as a new task in the activity of NEAA (NEAA 2021).

The managing authorities of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency are the Accreditation Council and its Chairperson, who is also the President of NEAA.

The Accreditation Council carries out its activities through 8 Standing Committees by areas of higher education and 1 Standing Committee on Post-Accreditation Monitoring and Control that the Accreditation Council formed.

The Committees comprise 3 to 7 members, one of whom is Chairman of the Committee. The Chairman of the Accreditation Council appoints the members of the Committees for a three-year term.

The Standing Committees by areas of higher education are the following (NEAA 2021):

- Standing Committee on Economic Sciences and Management
- Standing Committee on Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Computing
- Standing Committee on Agrarian Sciences and Veterinary Medicine
- Standing Committee on Social and Legal Sciences, Security and Defence
- Standing Committee on Technical Sciences
- Standing Committee on Educational Sciences and Social Activities
- Standing Committee on Healthcare and Sports
- Standing Committee on Humanities and Arts.

The Accreditation Council, through its Standing Committees, implements the following main activities (NEAA 2021):

1. Institutional accreditation of a higher school was carried out according to a criteria system adopted in 2016.
2. Program accreditation - carried out according to specific criteria adopted in 2016 in the following main areas:

- programme accreditation of professional fields;
  - programme accreditation of professional fields/ majors from the regulated professions;
  - programme accreditation of doctoral programmes.
3. Evaluation of projects:
- evaluation of projects for opening and transformation of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) under ESG (ESG 2015),
  - evaluation of projects to open and transform an HEI basic unit or affiliate under ESG (ESG 2015),
  - projects for opening a professional field/ major of the regulated professions under ESG (ESG 2015).

The main criteria for the accreditation of higher education institutions and individual professional fields can be summarized in the following ten standards (NEAA 2021):

1. Policy for quality assurance.
2. Design and approval of programmes.
3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment.
4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification.
5. Teaching staff.
6. Learning resources and student support.
7. Information management.
8. Public information.
9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes.
10. Cyclical external quality and assurance.

Each accreditation standard contains specific criteria and content, having the corresponding coefficient and number of points. The assessment is performed on a scale from 0 to 10 points, with 10 being the maximum accreditation assessment. Only higher education institutions with a grade above eight can conduct doctoral education.

The post-accreditation monitoring and control process criteria define the scope and content of post-accreditation monitoring and control on the implementation of the internal quality evaluation and assurance system for training and academic staff in higher schools (NEAA 2021). Following the European standards for the responsibility of higher schools to improve the quality of training as a result of interaction between teachers, students and institutional environment, the criteria focus on the education institution policy on the "life cycle" of students (admission, progression, graduation and realization).

The criteria are designed to ensure the effectiveness of post-accreditation interaction and dialogue between NEAA and higher schools in improving the quality of training to acquire educational and qualification degrees of higher education. In their entirety, the criteria are consistent with the objectives, principles and guidelines of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and with the national law. This enables the achievement of measurable implementation of a given standard through an appropriate criterion. Thus the need to enrich the content and characteristics of the criteria for post-accreditation monitoring and control of the implementation of the internal quality evaluation and assurance system for training and academic staff of higher schools is justified.

Each accreditation procedure for higher education institutions and professional fields/specialities includes the following mandatory activities:

- development of a self-assessment report of the higher school;
- meetings of the Expert Group with representatives of the higher school or the faculties and preparation of an evaluation report on the relevant standards and criteria;
- report of the Standing Committee for Evaluation and Accreditation;
- final evaluation by the NEAA Accreditation Council.

New Rules of Procedure of the Agency were adopted in January 2021 (NEAA 2021). They regulate the changed procedures for accreditation of distance learning in higher education, conducted in practice since 2017. A particular aspect is assessing the educational environment for distance learning and the provision of necessary electronic resources.

An essential document for the proper functioning of NEAA is the Code of Ethics (Code of Ethics 2021, available at: <https://www.neaa.government.bg/>). This Code defines the principles, values and rules of conduct that should be considered as a model in the implementation of the activities related to external quality assurance and accreditation in higher education, thus contributing to spreading a culture of quality and building public confidence in the results of the evaluation and accreditation in the Republic of Bulgaria (Code of Ethics, Art. 1, para. 1).

The basic principles, which constitute the general framework of NEAA activities and are included in its mission and goals, are the following: 1. legality and institutional responsibility; 2. continuous improvement of the quality of NEAA activities; 3. compliance with European and world practices; 4. esteem and respect for the institutional autonomy and academic freedom of the institutions evaluated and their representatives; 5. public accountability (Code of Ethics, Art. 2).

### **Educational Activity of the National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski"**

The National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" (NSA) is the only higher school in Bulgaria, specializing in the field of physical education, sports, tourism and kinesitherapy (National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" 2021, available

at: [www.nsa.bg](http://www.nsa.bg)). The National Sports Academy received the highest accreditation ratings in 2019 by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency.

A total of 3 000 students in the Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees in 4 different professional fields study at the NSA.

- The first one is the professional field of Pedagogy, in which graduates acquire professional qualifications as teachers in physical education and sports, and they can work at all levels of the educational system.
- The second is the professional field of Sports, which provides specialized education and training for future coaches in different sports, sports managers, sports commentators, sports animators and coaches in adapted physical activity and sports (for people with disabilities).
- The third one is the professional field of Public Health, and specialists can work as physiotherapists.
- The fourth is the professional field of Health Care, where graduates can work in rehabilitation and spa centres, sports institutions, etc.

The National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" offers a total of 17 Master's programmes in the four professional fields, in which there is a strong interest both from students who graduated from the NSA and from specialists who graduated from other universities in the country and abroad.

The National Sports Academy also conducts training courses for a Doctor's educational and scientific degree – three years for full-time education and four years for part-time education. The main doctoral programmes are the following:

1. Theory and methodology of sports science.
2. Sports psychology.
3. Physical education in the educational system.
4. Kinesitherapy.
5. Wellness - health promotion.

All curricula and programmes in the individual specialities and levels of education are constantly updated and modernized, undergoing a constant assessment and accreditation process in the individual professional fields. An internal system for the quality of education has been developed, with audits of curricula and students' opinions as an essential element. Graduates of the National Sports Academy in Sofia, Bulgaria find successful realization in the country and abroad.

## **Conclusions**

The higher education system in Bulgaria is part of the European educational area. Therefore, the established high standards and criteria for evaluation and accreditation of Bulgarian universities are a prerequisite for the future positive development of higher education and a closer relationship between universities and employers' organizations on the labor market.

The intensive legislative and social changes currently underway in the country provide an optimistic perspective of degree holders for professional development, offering the qualification and future career growth opportunities.

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## Ethics and Social Responsibility in High Education: Responding and Accountability

*José M. Zamora Calvo*

*Catedrático de Filosofía y Director  
del Departamento de Filosofía  
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras  
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid  
e-mail: jm.zamora@uam.es*

**Abstract:** *This paper focuses on the analysis of the concept of responsibility from a philosophical perspective, applied to higher education, highlighting its ethical, social and environmental dimensions. The concept of responsibility is crucial in contemporary ethics, from the proposal of the tension between ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility (Weber). Responsible judgment considers humanity as a subject and proposes a revised categorical imperative (Jonas). The ethical responsibility we owe to the world concerns the future of humanity. Responsibility appears in the governance and university structure within the delegation of power in the collegiate bodies. Governing bodies must respond and be accountable to the university community they represent. Service-learning represents a practice of social responsibility that contributes to making the university an ethically responsible institution, with a global and inclusive character in society. Education in social responsibility in research contributes to the search for the common good.*

**Keywords:** *ethical responsibility, social responsibility, service learning, research ethics, university governance, higher education*

**Rezumat:** *Lucrarea de fata se concentreaza pe analiza conceptului de responsabilitate dintr-o perspectiva filosofică, aplicata invatamantului superior, evidentiind dimensiunile etice, sociale si de mediu ale acestuia. Conceptul de responsabilitate este crucial în etica contemporană, începând cu propunerea legăturii dintre etica convingerii și etica responsabilității (Weber). Gândirea responsabilă consideră umanitatea ca subiect și propune un imperativ categoric revizuit (Jonas). Responsabilitatea etică pe care o datorăm lumii se referă la viitorul umanității. Responsabilitatea apare în structurile de guvernare și universitară din cadrul delegării puterii în mediul universitar. Managementul trebuie să răspundă și să fie responsabil în fața comunității universitare pe care o reprezintă. Serviciile în folosul comunității reprezintă o practică de responsabilitate socială care contribuie la transformarea universității într-o instituție responsabilă din punct de vedere etic, cu un caracter global și incluziv în societate. Educația în cadrul responsabilității sociale în cercetare contribuie la căutarea binelui comun.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *responsabilitate etică, responsabilitate socială, serviciu în folosul comunității, etica cercetării, guvernanta universitară, învățământ superior*

## Introduction

The term responsibility is probably one of the crucial terms for understanding ethics and politics. During the last few decades its theoretical packaging and its differentiated treatment, applied to different fields, has been addressed in monographs and specialised articles. However, the origin of the word is recent, since we had to wait until the 18th century to see the coining of the term “responsible” in Spanish, while the use of the word “responsibility” came about in the 19th century. It came into use in French and English much later on.

The concept of responsibility is one of the central categories of ethics. If the capacity to exercise responsibility is not presupposed on the part of the person who acts, there cannot properly be a moral evaluation of the action. Responsibility is a fundamental category that is present in people’s lives. One can be responsible in different spheres: family, social, economic, legal, moral, political, etc. Among the entries that appear in the RAE, responsibility means: (1) Responsible quality. (2) Debt, obligation to make amends by oneself or another person, as a result of a crime, offence or other legal cause. (3) Charge or moral obligation that comes about for someone from a possible error in a certain thing or matter. (4) Capacity existing in every active subject of law to recognise and accept the consequences of a freely performed act.

“Responsibility” is, above all, a debt, a burden, an obligation to make up for an offence or a crime, both in the moral and legal sense; and it is also the capacity of every active subject to recognise and accept the consequences of a freely performed act.

The common etymology of “answer” and “responsibility”: To “answer for” is to commit oneself to one’s actions, to guarantee their validity, to give an account of them and to corroborate them.

I will concentrate on the analysis of moral and social responsibility as applied to higher education, leaving aside other particularly important ones, such as political responsibility or legal responsibility.

## Ethics of Responsibility

The notion of “responsibility” from Max Weber’s point of view starts with the tension between “ethics of conviction” and “ethics of responsibility”, trying to corral the misunderstandings derived from it. Rethinking the Weberian ethics of responsibility can help us to rethink social responsibility from a contemporary perspective, returning, on the one hand, to explore the sources of the ethics of responsibility and, on the other hand, assuming the conceptual resources that responsibility provides.

In Weber’s late work, the tension between the ethics of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethik*) and the ethics of conviction (*Gesinnungsethik*) appears. The first text dates back to the years immediately preceding the First World War, but was published after his death, in 1921, in the compilation volume entitled *Wirtschaft*

*und Gesellschaft* (Winckelmann 1964). The formula “ethics of responsibility” does not yet appear, but the “ethics of conviction” is associated with prophetism and, for this reason, is opposed to ritual and legalistic religion. Ritualistic and legalistic religion conforms to the established order, and even tries to justify and preserve it by sacralising the law. The second text, entitled *Politik als Beruf* (1919), related to another publication entitled *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (1917/1919), which appears in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (1922) both published after his death in *Gesammelte politische Schriften* (1921). Weber describes the “ethics of conviction” as “absolute ethics”, “a-cosmic ethics” (outside of the world), as opposed to an “ethics of responsibility”, which is a “relative ethics”, “cosmic ethics”.

Responsibility” can be interpreted according to three different meanings that can be interconnected in various ways: (1) The concern and concentration of the subject on a task (being responsible corresponds to taking as seriously as possible the object one is dealing with). (2) Careful consideration of each individual case in order to make appropriate decisions based on the context and the foreseeable medium- and long-term effects, without fear of questioning certain principles. (3) The recognition of their actions and the assumption of their consequences, in particular the repair of any damage caused and, where appropriate, compliance with certain penalties. For Weber, the sense of the second meaning is imposed, which determines the other two. Between “ethics of conviction” and “ethics of responsibility” he establishes an “abysmal opposition”. In contrast to the “ethics of conviction”, which limits itself to doing its duty and, for the rest, entrusting itself to God, and which is not concerned with the ultimate effects of the actions it advocates, the “ethics of responsibility” is responsible for itself, that is to say, it foresees and assumes the consequences of the acts it proposes. The two ethics seem irreconcilable: “Any ethically oriented activity can be subordinated to two totally different and irreducibly opposed core ideas. It can be oriented according to the ethics of responsibility or according to the ethics of conviction” (Weber, *Politik als Beruf* [1919] 1992, 237). The shortcoming of the ethics of conviction is that it establishes a consistency between the end and the means, whereas the ethics of responsibility maintains that the end justifies the means. Now, according to Weber, everyday experience shows us that good can generate evil, and evil can generate good. There is, therefore, as exemplified by Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor, no irrefutable correlation between the means and the end.

The presence of the concept of responsibility in contemporary ethics comes from Hans Jonas, who, in *The Imperative of Responsibility. In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (German 1979, English 1984), provides us with the cornerstone of a new edifice. According to Jonas, in the face of the unprecedented expansion of our technical capacities, traditional ethics is not sufficient, since it had been elaborated in the context, now obsolete, of a human action incapable of really affecting nature, which is fundamentally immutable. “Nature is no longer as it once was, but precisely our power over it, which from now on distresses us, both for nature’s sake and for our own.”

The *Imperative of Responsibility* uses the concepts of nature and technique considered in their mutual interdependence. Jonas, like Aristotle, interprets nature as the whole of what exists and tends by itself to exist; artificial objects, on the other hand, are produced by technology.

However, technology is going through an unprecedented situation. Jonas speaks to us of an “objective” responsibility that we owe to the world. The new technical power requires new obligations. Hence, how imperative it is to preserve the existence of men in the future: “Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life”; or negatively: “Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life.” (Jonas 1984, 11). For Jonas it is necessary to *take root in people*, beyond the *subjectivism of values*, the new duty of man that has just appeared (Jonas 1984, 15–19). It is not enough to update Kantian’s categorical imperative. Neither Kantian morality nor Aristotelian ethics are concerned with the effects of our actions beyond the contemporary space for a community of present actors. However, it is about the effects of our actions, or our omissions, on agents beyond this sphere. The criterion of universalisation must not be hypothetical, as in the Kantian imperative, but really conditional: it acts so that there is humanity, and that this humanity is true. Only this version of the imperative, according to Jonas, deserves to be called “categorical” (Jonas 1984, 43–44, 88–89). So that the responsible judgement would now be to consider humanity as the subject and centre of a sort of renewed categorical imperative.

The notion of “responsibility” poses multiple problems. We start with the difficulty and complexity of analysing this category, from different philosophical perspectives, which we will try to project in our current horizon of higher education. Since the Greeks, we tend to identify responsibility with an eminently juridical category that, on certain occasions, appears related to the political sphere, referring in both cases to the field of guilt (Aramayo 2003, 15–19). Moral responsibility, however, concerns above all the individual and cannot simply be generalised to the members of a given collective. It requires active participation of the subjects who take sides in favour of certain facts.

As proposed by Arrieta Heras and De la Cruz Ayuso (2005, 21), we will not deal with responsibility understood as a legal principle, since we start with the hypothesis that social responsibility constitutes a new way of managing organisations insofar as it surpasses and extends the limits of the exclusively legal meaning.

Following the itinerary of Kant, Weber and Jonas, continuing a dialogue with Cruz (1999) and Muguerza (2007), Aramayo (2011) tries to define the restricted field of moral responsibility, highlighting its characteristic features, to better differentiate it from its juridical, political or even psychoanalytical meanings.

Indeed, responsibility implies the need to respond to the consequences generated by a freely accepted action and, in parallel, this need presupposes the capacity of the subject, whether individually or collectively considered, to assume this response (Del Águila Tejerina 2005, 343–344). Thus, for someone to be effectively

responsible, in addition to the capacity to be so, it is required that he or she exercise the freely chosen action.

Power is a *conditio sine qua non* (indispensable condition) of taking responsibility (Jonas 1984, 91). In this sense, it could be argued that impotence absolves us of all responsibility, that is to say, *wanting* is not enough if it is not necessarily accompanied by *power*. In the realm of moral responsibility, any share of responsibility “will always depend on the strength we have to perform or prevent the act for which we are accountable” (Cruz and Aramayo 1999, 30).

## Responsibility and University Governance

Accountability, indeed, is a central concept in higher education. Linked as it is to other crucial concepts (academic freedom, research, management, service-learning, university quality assurance, government, governance and university autonomy, continuous assessment, institutional accreditation, electoral processes, creation and recognition of universities, internationalisation, mobility, external academic practices, etc.), responsibility orders and gives meaning to all the others.

The strategic elements that make up higher education correspond to the following: university governance and structure – Faculties, Schools, Departments and Research Institutes –, university funding, teaching, research and transfer, students, teaching and research staff and administration and services staff. University governance is based on ideas such as representation and delegation. The basic factor of university governance and structure is not direct participation in decision-making, but the election of a set of representatives — chancellor, dean, members of the faculty board, staff, department or institute director — who, “in our name”, representing us, govern. This delegation of power to collegiate bodies is at the origin of the government and representation of universities and of the parallel responsibility that we usually demand of those who govern us. For the correct functioning of university structures, this representation must be accompanied by mechanisms that guarantee that the entire institutional framework is based on the consent of the university community and the will of the governed.

The current structure must be adapted to achieve a better relationship between university participation and day-to-day management, in addition to the strategic planning of each university. Delegation and representation only function legitimately if they are accompanied by the accountability of the governing bodies to the university community. The mechanisms of participation and control of university management correspond to the governing bodies of the university, such as the Governing Council and the Faculty; or in the faculties, the Faculty Board and the Department Councils. Participation is a fundamental element that must be regulated and in which the university community, in the exercise of its autonomy, must feel involved. Be that as it may, in university governance there should be no delegation of power without effective responsibility and accountability to those who are delegated. No delegation can be exercised without responsibility for the composition of the

governing bodies, systems of election, mechanisms of control and participation of the university community and society. This link between representativeness and accountability is a key element in understanding how our universities function. Therefore, the existence of a university independent adjudicator is crucial to the existence of effective accountability in higher education institutions.

In order to develop and improve these areas of accountability, it may be feasible to point out the need to give quality assessment agencies a prominent role, professionalising some of their functions, with the aim of generating agile, critical and independent communication between the institutions and society, with the aim of creating a special sensitivity to these issues among the members of the university community that makes it possible to judge accountability without being dragged down by simplistic solutions.

### **Social Responsibility (RS) and Service-Learning (SL)**

Organisations are responsible when they have the capacity or power to act, exercise the power themselves and know the specific circumstances of the action, choose to carry out the action deliberately and consciously, and produce consequences as a result of the action exercised (Arrieta Heras and De la Cruz Ayuso 2005, 33).

Social responsibility represents an emerging dynamic in the current field of higher education. It arises from the increasingly clear awareness of the inevitable impacts that university activity implies in this globalised world. It affects the entire higher education environment — teaching, research, knowledge transfer and management — with a social or environmental impact. But there is one decisive aspect that we will focus on next: Service-Learning (SL). Not only does SL make higher education more humane, but it can also make the university as a whole more humane as a socially and ethically responsible institution. Likewise, it contributes to strengthening proximity and human dimensions, fostering a sense of community and civic commitment (Rubio Serrano and Escofet Roig 2017).

The SL constitutes a practice of university social responsibility that contributes to the university being an ethically responsible institution. Most definitions consider that university social responsibility has to do with an ethical positioning of the university, with the implementation of principles and values for the improvement of the university (Vallaey 2014; Martínez-Usarralde, Gil-Salom, and Macías-Mendoza 2019; Mayor Paredes and Guillen-Gamez 2021). Social responsibility applied to higher education must have a global and integrating character. Its practice affects all the elements that make up all the activities that take place on university campuses: teaching, research, knowledge transfer, management, as well as lifelong learning, work organisation, equal opportunities, social inclusion, sustainable development, etc. All of these must be managed by a university that wants to be socially responsible.

Social responsibility thus has a transversal character that runs through all work related to higher education. The integration of community service with teaching and

reflection constitutes an innovative educational practice that combines curricular learning objectives with social service objectives, where social responsibility takes on a predominant role.

We can argue that for SL to be an educational strategy that helps collective transformation, it needs a focus on social responsibility that prevents it from becoming mere charity, which would reinforce inequality. Such an approach needs to be based on principles and design that deepen reflection and critical thinking for action. We conclude that higher education alone can hardly change society, but without it, it is impossible to do so (Murillo Torrecilla and Aramburuzabala Higuera 2014, 51–53).

Student involvement in SL projects increases social responsibility (García Ramos et al. 2016). The SL is an educational proposal that, applied to higher education, combines curricular learning processes and community service in a single well-articulated project in which the participants, students and teachers, learn by working from the real needs of the environment in order to improve it.

### **Ethics and Responsibility of Research**

The technological development that has taken place in many fields of science and engineering, applied nowadays to almost all disciplines, be they pure sciences or human and social sciences, makes it more necessary than ever to reflect on the knowledge acquired in their progress and their responsibility in the environmental, social and economic changes that affect not only human beings but all living beings. This is why education in social responsibility is also necessary in the field of research in general that is carried out at universities. The World Conference on Science for the Twenty-first Century, held in Budapest in 1999 and co-organised by UNESCO and ICSU (International Council for Science), established that: “The ethics and responsibility of science should be an integral part of the education and training of all scientists. It is important to instil in students a positive attitude of reflection, vigilance and sensitivity to the ethical issues they may encounter in their professional lives” (Article 71). It is therefore necessary, that the university institutions, offer transversal training in the field of ethics and responsibility in research, in order to encourage reflection on research activity and its impact on the society in which we live and the world we inhabit.

In the third chapter of *Ecclesiastes*, “the time of inquiry” (*tempus quaerendi*) is opposed to “the time of loss” (*tempus perdendi*). But, in our field of higher education, the biblical expression of the Vulgate, *tempus quaerendi*, corresponds to the time devoted to research, that is to say, a time that, in practice, lasts forever, since the characteristic of research is to always keep looking, without ever stopping in its pursuit. Therefore, research is a critical attitude that protects us from boredom, laziness, and allows us to keep up to date, always curious and active, intellectually dynamic, with the ability to observe wonderful things, always located at the beginning. Likewise, we must not forget that the pleasure of the quest is even more

important than achieving the result; it is not, in fact, a question of reaching Ithaca, but of making an Odyssey.

The emergence of ethics in this central area of our university way of life should make us sensitive to the fact that responsibility in research also plays an important part in ethical responsibility. A responsibility that must at the same time be sure to sustain our ideas and work methodologies and to combine them adequately with our ideas regarding the common good.

## Conclusion

Responsibility is a way of alluding to the condition of agent in action, since, in acting, on our own behalf or on behalf of others, we have an impact on the world and on others, and we have to answer for it. In this case, the focus is not on the origins of an act but on its consequences. Being responsible implies taking responsibility for our past actions and their impact on the present state of the world and taking responsibility for the impacts of an action and its way of influencing the future of the world.

Jonas (1984) mentions an “objective” responsibility that we owe to the world, to the physical environment that surrounds us, and whose preservation guarantees our existence. The earth is threatened and the responsibility for its present and future belongs to all humanity. Therefore, any theory of responsibility must broaden its scope and lead us to take responsibility, not only for the fulfilment of certain principles or accountability to our fellow citizens, but also for nature and the future generations that can only live in it. Curbing the impact of overflowing technology on the earth and on the future becomes the act of responsibility par excellence from which the university cannot remain on the sidelines.

We can distinguish three dimensions of social responsibility: environmental, social and ethical. These three dimensions make up the content thereof and it is necessary to consider all three in order to proceed with an adequate implementation in the field of higher education. However, the integration of socially responsible management in higher education appears to be linked to innovation and quality processes in such a way that a university cannot implement socially responsible management if it does not also focus on innovation and quality. The incorporation of social responsibility into strategic university governance results in the improvement of the quality of education. Its initial costs represent an investment whose benefits have to be interpreted in terms of continuous improvement and obtaining additional competitive and different advantages with respect to educational institutions that do not apply it.

In the European Higher Education Area, higher education is a subjective right for citizens. Social responsibility and university quality assurance make it possible to adapt higher education to move towards a horizon in which science and knowledge occupy the place they deserve, in which the university, with a stable funding model that strengthens it, represents a commitment to the future integrated into the European and international context.

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## Responsabilitatea socială a universităților. Teorie, experiențe, practici

*Bogdan Gheorghiuță*

*Lect. univ. dr.*

*Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu  
bogdan.gheorghita@ulbsibiu.ro*

*Sabina-Adina Luca*

*Lect. univ. dr.*

*Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu  
sabina.luca@ulbsibiu.ro*

*Anamaria Tudorie*

*Lect. univ. dr.*

*Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu  
anamaria.tudorie@ulbsibiu.ro*

**Rezumat:** Pornind de la dimensiunile conceptului de responsabilitate socială (RS), respectiv a celui de responsabilitate socială corporatistă (CSR) prin studiul de față ne-am propus să ilustrăm modalități concrete prin care astfel de practici au fost derulate în mediul universitar, atât în străinătate cât și în țara noastră. Am realizat aceste lucruri printr-un demers exploratoriu construit pe două componente. Prima componentă a vizat o succintă radiografiere a unor programe sau proiecte derulate deja în cadrul anumitor universități din România și din străinătate. Cea de-a doua a vizat un studiu de caz și anume cel al Facultății de Științe Socio-Umane din cadrul Universității „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu. Este vorba de proiecte fie organizate direct de către comunitatea academică, fie în colaborare cu partenerii de la nivel local, precum și de modul în care unele dintre acțiuni au evoluat și s-au dezvoltat, în timp.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** responsabilitate socială (corporatistă), implicare socială, comunitate, voluntariat

**Abstract:** Starting from the dimensions of the concept of Social Responsibility (SR), respectively of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), in the present study, we intend to illustrate concrete ways through which such practices were conducted in universities, both abroad and in Romania. We have accomplished this through an exploratory study built on two components. The first one targeted short radiography of some programmes or projects already carried out in some universities from Romania and abroad. The second one targeted a case study of The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities from „Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu. We refer either to projects organised directly by the academic community or in collaboration with local partners. Some of these actions have evolved and developed, in time.

**Keywords:** (corporate) social responsibility, social involvement, community, volunteering

## Introducere

Conceptul de responsabilitate socială (RS) este astăzi utilizat pe scară largă, atât în sfera economicului, de la care, de altfel, a pornit, cât și în sfera socialului sau politicului. Însușit de către companii (cunoscut sub numele de „responsabilitate socială corporatistă/a companiilor, din lb. eng. Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR) și orientat către cauze sociale sau beneficii comunitare, acest concept se regăsește tot mai mult în strategiile de marketing corporatiste, în programele sociale ale diverselor ONG-uri, în programele organizațiilor politice sau ale grupurilor de presiune și chiar în planurile de activități ale diverselor instituții publice.

Într-un demers exploratoriu, pornind de la exemple de bună practică de responsabilitate socială, prezentând un studiu de caz, ne propunem să înțelegem sfera de cuprindere a conceptului CSR și aplicabilitatea acestuia la mediul universitar românesc. Desigur, limitele unui astfel de demers sunt evidente. Exemplificările nu sunt exhaustive, ci urmăresc concret să ilustreze modalități de implicare și bune practici din domeniu. Ne propunem, așadar, să identificăm dimensiuni de abordare în ceea ce privește CSR în mediul universitar românesc și să prezentăm exemple de bună practică în domeniu, elemente care pot defini, în viitor, abordările sinergice specifice.

Înainte însă de a detalia conceptul de responsabilitate socială considerăm necesar să explicăm conceptele de responsabilitate, respectiv de responsabilitate publică, deoarece responsabilitatea socială este subsumată responsabilității publice, la fel cum este și responsabilitatea economică, responsabilitatea administrativă, responsabilitatea civică, responsabilitatea juridică ș.a.m.d.

Responsabilitatea este considerată ca fiind obligația unei persoane de a efectua ceva, de a răspunde, de a da socoteală de ceva, suportând consecințele pentru efectele produse. A fi responsabil implică a avea o funcție de răspundere, o atitudine conștientă și simț de răspundere față de obligațiile sociale. În fond, este vorba de o răspundere pe care și-o asumă cineva, ceea ce implică o anumită conștiință a datoriei și o activitate depusă cu conștiinciozitate (Măntăluță, ed. 2007, 10). În legătură cu conceptul de responsabilitate apare frecvent menționată ideea puterii decizionale, însă și cea a obligației îndreptării greșelilor atunci când deciziile nu au fost adecvate sau când acțiunile au produs prejudicii.

„Termenul de „responsabilitate publică” se regăsește frecvent în asociere cu „morală și etică” organizațiilor și instituțiilor. Aspectul etic al responsabilității morale este legat de acțiunile întreprinse și de consecințele lor în plan social. De aceea, discursul despre responsabilitate nu poate fi rupt de discursul privind aspectele formalizate ale culturii organizaționale (coduri etice, coduri de conduită profesională) și de aspectele intrinseci și neformalizate – asumare, inițiativă organizațională, independență decizională și chiar rezistență la presiuni, în numele responsabilității publice, al legalității în integralitatea sa și al unei raționalități izvorâte din asumarea conștientă a misiunii” (Măntăluță, ed. 2007, 12). În sfera de cuprindere a responsabilității publice apare și răspunderea, însemnând evaluarea

acțiunilor și mai ales a consecințelor acestora asupra vieții comunităților și indivizilor, evaluare care se înscrie în linia coordonatelor legislative în vigoare.

## **Responsabilitatea socială corporatistă**

Primele încercări de utilizare a conceptului de responsabilitate socială a companiilor au început în jurul anilor 1950, constatându-se că responsabilitatea față de societate poate constitui un element de diferențiere foarte puternic pentru companii, întrucât consumatorii încep să fie mai receptivi la mesajele companiilor care urmăresc dezvoltarea durabilă a societății, decât cele care sunt pasive la acest lucru și sunt percepute ca având ca unică direcție profitul (Orzan și Stancu 2014). Howard Bower, definea CSR ca fiind: „obligațiile oamenilor de afaceri de a urma acele politici, de a lua acele decizii sau de a urma acele direcții care sunt agreeate în termeni de valori și obiective de către societatea noastră” (Bower 1953). Davis (1973) afirma că conceptul de responsabilitate socială corporatistă se referă la „considerațiile unei firme și reacția acesteia la aspecte ce depășesc cerințele economice, tehnice și juridice în vederea realizării beneficiilor sociale, de mediu și bănești pe care firma le urmărește”, iar pentru Holt și Wigginton, responsabilitatea socială corporatistă reprezintă „obligația unei organizații de a desfășura o activitate în așa fel încât să asigure bunăstarea societății în timp ce își urmărește realizarea propriilor interese economice” (Holt și Wigginton 2002, 119). Așa după cum putem observa, conceptul de CSR este multidimensional și se concentrează pe răspunsul companiilor la problematica socială a comunităților în care acestea activează. Nu e vorba doar despre o „întoarcere” a profitului realizat de companii către comunitate, ci și despre datoria morală pe care o au diferite entități cu potențial financiar sau de altă natură, de a veni în întâmpinarea necesităților comunităților.

Pentru Alan Reder (1994, 121), compania care servește un scop social pozitiv, dincolo de cel al furnizării de locuri de muncă, poate apela la bunăvoința angajaților săi, care ar putea ierta ocazionala încălcare a intereselor lor. Compania care nu are niciun scop productiv în afară de adăugarea dolarilor în economie poate descoperi că, chiar și atunci când încearcă să îndulcească miza pentru angajații săi, caută „o gaură fără fund”.

Corporațiilor de astăzi li se cere să facă o mulțime de lucruri. Acestea trebuie să creeze produse utile, de încredere, la un preț rezonabil și care nu dăunează mediului. În producerea acestor bunuri și servicii, corporațiile trebuie să-și trateze bine angajații, să evite discriminarea, să evite poluarea, să conserve resursele, să plătească taxe și să respecte o varietate de legi care acoperă aceste aspecte cât și altele. Ele trebuie să contribuie la obiectivele societății în domenii în afara sau doar parțial legate de propria afacere, cum ar fi educația, reabilitarea urbană și buna guvernare (Wallich 1982, 362).

Constatăm că, mai nou, nu doar prin profitul obținut este evaluată o companie, ci și prin modalitățile prin care părți din profit se întorc în comunitate în mijlocul

căreia compania l-a obținut. „Se spune frecvent că puterea implică responsabilitate. Se ajunge la concluzia că, deoarece se presupune că corporațiile au o mare putere, ele trebuie să fie trase la răspundere într-un sens foarte larg” (Wallich 1982, 362).

Așa cum afirmă Steven J. Skinner și John M. Ivancevich (1992, 133), responsabilitatea socială este conștientizarea faptului că activitățile de afaceri au un impact asupra societății și luarea în considerare a acestui impact de către firme în luarea deciziilor. O firmă responsabilă din punct de vedere social depune eforturi deliberate, regulate, pentru a-și spori impactul pozitiv asupra societății, reducându-și, în același timp, impactul negativ. Practicarea responsabilității sociale costă bani, însă lipsa acesteia are costurile ei – fie în amenzi, reglementări sporite, publicitate negativă, defavorizare publică sau pierdere de clienți.

Unii autori sunt foarte fermi, afirmând că „numai companiile care urmăresc CSR-ul dintr-un sentiment de convingere autentică vor reuși pe termen lung – și termenul lung este cel care contează” (Hollender & Fenichell 2003, 245).

Iată că, regăsite în strategiile de marketing ale companiilor, proiectele de responsabilitate socială vin tot mai mult în sprijinul nevoilor comunităților, mergând în direcția unei dezvoltări durabile. O diferențiere tot mai clară între companii a început să se observe și în țara noastră în funcție de rolul asumat de către acestea în gestionarea problemelor comunitare deja existente sau în preîntâmpinarea altora posibile. După integrarea europeană, în România au prins tot mai mult teren domenii economice care implică o responsabilitate socială mai mare, precum managementul deșeurilor, producerea energiei regenerabile, agroturismul, desfacerea de produse organice și altele. Calitatea mediului, protecția socială a categoriilor vulnerabile, educația sau sănătatea sunt principalele domenii spre care s-au orientat proiectele de responsabilitate socială corporatistă în România ultimelor mai bine de două decenii. Însă, potrivit altor autori (Șerban și Kaufmann 2011), majoritatea organizațiilor nu inițiază activități privind CSR. Mai degrabă ele sunt forțate de factori interni și externi să se angajeze în acțiuni privind CSR, în parte datorită așteptărilor continue de schimbare a modului de a face afaceri și de etică în afaceri. Din ce în ce mai multe persoane și grupuri de interes solicită organizațiilor să dezvolte afaceri responsabile și transparente din punct de vedere economic, ecologic și social. Răspunsurile organizațiilor la aceste așteptări ale societății, în particular implementarea unor diverse acțiuni și inițiative de CSR, au ca efect schimbarea culturii organizaționale, dar și o adevărată schimbare socială a comunității. Un alt motiv îl reprezintă puterea crescândă a organizațiilor non-guvernamentale (ONG) de a mobiliza resurse și de a colabora cu diverse organizații private și publice pentru abordarea problemelor sociale, de mediu și CSR. Un alt treilea motiv îl reprezintă presiunea exercitată de consumatori prin definirea unor specificații și standarde ridicate, ca de exemplu, industria alimentară în Europa, unde consumatorii solicită implementarea unor standarde ridicate de calitate și de siguranță pentru produsele alimentare. Astfel, dorința organizațiilor de a se comporta ca „un cetățean responsabil”, atât din punct de vedere caritativ, dar și din punct de vedere economic, este din ce în ce mai

prezentă, cu toate că modul în care se poate transforma această dorință în strategie și implementarea acesteia în organizație este dificil de înțeles și de monitorizat (Șerban și Kaufmann 2011).

Conceptul a cunoscut multiple reconstrucții. De exemplu, la începutul anilor 1990, revistele de specialitate dezbăteau unele dimensiuni ale acestuia. În Revista Business Horizons apărea subliniat faptul că, în afară de conceptul de responsabilitate socială corporatistă (CSR), au fost utilizate, conexe, și alte concepte, precum “corporate citizenship”, CSP - “corporate social performance”, “business ethics theory”, “stakeholder theory” (Carroll 1991). În concepția acestui autor, patru factori compun definiția responsabilității sociale corporatiste: factorul economic, factorul legal, factorul etic și factorul filantropic. Spre deosebire de factorul legal și cel economic, prezente întotdeauna la nivelul companiilor, factorul etic și cel filantropic și-a făcut cunoscută prezența abia în anii '90. Carroll a denumit acești factori „piramida responsabilității sociale corporatiste”. Cei patru factori sau elemente desemnau responsabilități asumate în cadrul companiei. Prin factorul sau elementul economic, Carroll înțelegea responsabilitatea de a avea câștig în urma investițiilor făcute de stakeholderi, factorul sau elementul legal însemna responsabilitatea respectării legii, elementul etic desemna responsabilitatea de a adera la normele sociale acceptate în societate, iar elementul sau factorul filantropic presupunea responsabilitatea deținerii unui rol clar în ajutorul oferit în mod voluntar pentru diverse segmente ale societății (Carroll 1991).

Cum societățile sunt foarte diferite, modelele de responsabilitate socială trebuie și ele să fie diferite, în sensul adaptării lor la specificul problemelor comunitare, pentru că, ceea ce poate avea succes la nivelul unei societăți sau comunități, se poate solda cu eșec la nivelul alteia. Neexistând practici universale valabile de CSR, acestea este ideal să fie gândite aplicat pentru probleme specifice, pentru locuri specifice, pentru categorii specifice de cetățeni și pentru perioade de timp specifice.

Kotler și Lee (2005) au reușit să identifice un număr de șase acțiuni sau practici de responsabilitate socială corporatistă care se pare că, în timp, s-au soldat cu efecte pozitive pentru organizațiile care le-au valorificat. Cei doi autori au numit aceste practici „Inițiative Sociale Corporatiste” (“Corporate Social Initiatives”) și le-au definit ca fiind „majoritatea activităților pe care o corporație le inițiază pentru a sprijini cauzele sociale și pentru a îndeplini angajamentele responsabilității sociale corporatiste” (Kotler și Lee 2005, 23). Aceste șase practici sunt:

1. “Cause Promotions” (compania participă financiar sau cu alte resurse pentru susținerea diverselor cauze sociale, pentru care poate fi inițiator sau partener);
2. “Cause-Related Marketing” (compania donează pentru o anumită cauză, pe termen determinat, o parte din veniturile rezultate în urma vinderii unui anumit produs);
3. “Corporate Social Marketing” (compania poate să inițieze sau să fie partener al unui ONG într-o campanie care vizează anumite schimbări de comportament

la nivelul membrilor unei comunități, scopul fiind realizarea unor progrese privind mediul, securitatea socială, sănătatea cetățenilor etc.);

4. “Corporate Philanthropy” (compania contribuie în mod direct la o cauză, sub formă de donații, subvenții în numerar sau diferite tipuri de servicii, iar esențial aici este orientarea resurselor firmei în direcția valorilor sociale la care firma aderă);
5. “Community Volunteering” (compania stimulează și susține proprii angajați sau parteneri în a se implica voluntar pentru a sprijini comunitatea în care compania se dezvoltă);
6. “Socially Responsible Business Practices” (compania implementează practici discreționare în investițiile pe care le face și care vizează diverse cauze sociale și binele comun (Kotler și Lee 2005, 24)).

International Institute for Sustainable Development a publicat, în 2007, studiul lui Hohnen, care a identificat zece factori ce au influențat dezvoltarea responsabilității sociale corporatiste, atrăgând atenția asupra noului rol al companiilor, acela de a fi responsabile în fața problemelor sociale:

1. Dezvoltarea durabilă (prin identificarea unor probleme ca de exemplu folosirea improprie a resurselor naturale);
2. Globalizarea (prin detectarea impactului pe care afacerile extinse la nivel global influențează forța de muncă și economiile locale);
3. Guvernarea (prin rapoarte, ghiduri și alte instrumente pe care guverne și diverse organizații precum Uniunea Europeană, The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) și International Labor Organization (ILO) le-au realizat pentru a seta conduita adecvată în mediul de afaceri);
4. Impactul sectorului corporatist (prin influența companiilor asupra mediului, socialului sau politicului);
5. Comunicarea (prin posibilitățile pe care tehnologiile avansate le oferă astăzi pentru dezvoltarea dialogului și a parteneriatelor);
6. Capitalul financiar (prin interesul consumatorilor și investitorilor de a sprijini afacerile responsabile din punct de vedere social);
7. Etica (prin respectarea regulilor de etică și transparență sporită în afaceri);
8. Consecvență și comunitate (prin grija față de mediu și componenta socială, indiferent de stat);
9. Leadership (prin posibilitatea de acțiune în acele domenii în care reglementările par improbabile);
10. Instrumente de afaceri (prin recunoașterea de către companii a faptului că acțiunile de CSR pot duce la dezvoltarea afacerii și a brandului) (Hohnen 2007).

Desigur, de-a lungul timpului au apărut și contestări ai responsabilității sociale corporatiste. În acest sens, Henderson (2004) susține că CSR-ul nu este cheia soluțiilor economice și sociale și că „cea mai eficientă modalitate de a îmbunătăți contribuția afacerilor la societate este de a extinde domeniul de aplicare și de a îmbunătăți funcționalitatea piețelor”.

După inventarierea sferei de cuprindere a acestui concept, considerăm că, prin intermediul unor astfel de acțiuni, întreprinse de diferite entități cu potențial financiar sau de altă natură, pot fi rezolvate multe probleme de pe agenda publică pe care altfel programele de guvernare locală nu au putut să le rezolve. Mai ales în România, astfel de practici pot înlocui, de multe ori, politici publice specifice.

### **Responsabilitatea socială universitară. Premise de analiză**

Marea provocare privind CSR este extinderea practicilor de responsabilitate socială de la nivelul companiilor sau corporațiilor, la nivelul diverselor instituții.

Una din întrebările care ne-au preocupat a fost legată de instituțiile de învățământ superior, mai exact de rolul pe care universitățile îl pot juca în derularea de programe și proiecte de responsabilitate socială. Dispun ele de resursele (umane, financiare, tehnologice etc.) necesare pentru implementarea unor astfel de proiecte? Consideră necesare astfel de proiecte din moment ce își asumă un rol de participant activ în comunitatea în care se dezvoltă? Care sunt limitele proiectelor de responsabilitate socială pe care o universitate le poate realiza, pe lângă preocuparea legată de calitatea actului educațional, preocupare care rămâne primordială pentru universități. Aceasta cu atât mai mult cu cât, prin intermediul unor astfel de activități, calitatea actului educațional poate cunoaște noi valențe.

Se vorbește tot mai mult astăzi de dubla valență a responsabilității universităților, atât pe plan local, cât și pe plan global, în sensul contribuției la dezvoltarea unei societăți mai echitabile și mai sustenabile. Universitățile ar trebui să se preocupe de modul în care angajamentul „glocal” ar putea fi inclus în predare, învățare, cercetare, activitățile instituționale, guvernare și leadership (GUNI 2017, 41). Unele dintre prerogative ar fi schimbarea rolului instituțiilor de învățământ superior în lumina globalizării, a tendințelor și provocărilor actuale, regândirea curriculum-ului adaptat secolului 21, implicarea la nivel global și local prin prisma eticii, creșterea rolului rețelelor și consorțiilor în realizarea angajamentului „glocal” sau finanțarea proceselor de schimbare (GUNI 2017, 52).

Responsabilitatea socială universitară este susținută de către UNESCO tot în ideea angajamentului, nu doar pe plan local, ci și pe plan global. În raportul rezultat în urma studiului realizat de către Global University Network for Innovations în 2017, finanțat preponderent de UNESCO, apare menționată și una din universitățile românești. Este vorba de Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu, despre care este precizat faptul că are statut de membru fondator al inițiativei „Academic Impact”, la care au aderat instituții de învățământ superior care și-au asumat angajamentul de a susține mai multe

principii universal acceptate în arii precum educația, drepturile omului, dezvoltarea de competențe, sustenabilitate și rezolvarea conflictelor (GUNI 2017, 114).

Una din ideile tot mai frecvent vehiculate în ultimii ani pe plan internațional este aceea că universitățile trebuie să fie pe deplin conștiente de abordările atât la nivel local, cât și la nivel global, ale problemelor sociale, că ar trebui să exploreze soluții la problemele locale, pentru ca, ulterior, să contribuie prin experiența proprie, la provocările internaționale.

Ne propunem, așadar, în acest articol, ilustrarea unor exemple de bună practică, atât din străinătate, cât și din România, și prezentarea, ca studiu de caz, a programelor de responsabilitate socială derulate de Facultatea de Științe Socio-Umane a Universității „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu. Deși în mediul economic CSR este prezent de mai multe zeci de ani, în mediul universitar, la acest moment, preocupările sunt mai timide și par mai degrabă sporadice, de dată mai recentă. La aceste acțiuni participarea este mai degrabă voluntară, cu implicarea studenților și a cadrelor didactice motivate în această direcție.

### **Exemple de CSR în universități din țară și străinătate**

În dorința de a identifica modalitățile de implicare pe linia responsabilității sociale a universităților am încercat prezentarea unor exemple de bună practică din România și din străinătate. Unele dintre ele sunt desfășurate sistematic, au implicat resurse financiare mai însemnate, presupunând chiar colaborări mai ample sau consorții universitare. Iar altele s-au derulat sporadic, punctual și au presupus resurse reduse, bazându-se în principal pe voluntariat.

Un prim exemplu de CSR universitar pe care îl avem în vedere este cel al uneia din universitățile din Iordania, Hashemite University, instituție care beneficiază de finanțare din partea statului (Alzyoud și Bani-Hani 2015, 126). Aceasta a dezvoltat un program coerent de responsabilitate socială printr-un parteneriat între facultăți, studenți, comunitate și mediul industrial din zonă. Universitarii de aici au gândit proiectele vizând responsabilitatea socială în funcție de 5 obiective majore (Alzyoud și Bani-Hani 2015, 126-128): implicarea socială a Hashemite University, prin asigurarea accesului la programe sociale, oferind granturi și diverse certificări; înființarea unor centre pentru învățământ la distanță prin care să poată asigura, în regim online, accesul la educație superioară pentru studenții care au un loc de muncă și nu pot ajunge în locațiile clasice; asigurarea unei colaborări între universitate și mediul industrial prin semnarea unor parteneriate cu fabricile locale, cu scopul de a colabora în proiecte de cercetare, educație și dezvoltare industrială; prin programul de management instituțional care promovează utilizarea energiilor regenerabile în campus, reducerea consumului de hârtie și reciclarea acesteia sau prin plantarea de pomi; prin angajamentul față de comunitate, un exemplu în acest sens fiind asigurarea unor servicii medicale gratuite, cu sprijinul staff-ului și a studenților, pentru persoane fără posibilități materiale.

În Marea Britanie, acțiunile de responsabilitate socială ale mediului universitar par a fi mai clar enunțate și susținute. Amintim, în acest sens, cazul Universității din Londra, care, în luna iunie a anului 2020 a emis o declarație cu privire la acest aspect, sub titlul *University of London - Corporate Social Responsibility Statement* (University of London 2020), incluzând aici șase teme majore pe care le va urmări, printre care se regăesc: beneficiul public și sustenabilitatea mediului.

În schimb, Universitatea din Westminster, la capitolul responsabilitate socială, își propune să atingă trei obiective clare, și anume: leadership, comunitate și sustenabilitate (University of Westminster), în vreme ce Universitatea din Manchester a lansat un *Plan de cinci ani* (University of Manchester) prin care și-a propus obiective precum: incluziune socială, sănătate mai bună, angajament cultural, sau sustenabilitatea mediului. Un alt exemplu, din Marea Britanie, pe care îl propunem spre discuție, este al Universității din Edinburgh. Grație inițiativelor de pionierat în ceea ce privește diminuarea efectelor schimbărilor climatice, această universitate a beneficiat, la 1 iulie 2021, de vizita Majestății Sale Regina Marii Britanii, la nou-numitul Institut pentru Schimbările Climatice din Edinburgh, iar la finalul turului regal a fost anunțat *The Edinburgh Earth Initiative (EEI)* un proiect care va impulsiona leadership-ul global în adoptarea de măsuri pentru a diminua efectele schimbărilor climatice (University of Edinburgh).

Există și inițiative mai ample, derulate prin consorții. Un exemplu în acest sens este reprezentat de *USR Network* (University Social Responsibility Network), care reunește 16 universități din întreaga lume: Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan; Beijing Normal University, China; Clare Hall, University of Cambridge, Marea Britanie; Kyoto University, Japonia; Peking University, China; Sichuan University, China; Simon Fraser University, Canada; The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong; The University of Manchester, Marea Britanie; Tufts University, S.U.A.; University of Haifa, Israel; University of New South Wales, Australia; University of Pretoria, Africa de Sud; University of Sao Paulo, Brazilia; Washington University in St. Louis, S.U.A.; Yonsei University, Coreea (University Social Responsibility Network 2018). Fondată în anul 2015, *USR Network* a pornit de la ideea că universitățile trebuie să își extindă misiunea lor tradițională și înspre dezvoltarea de soluții economice și sociale, dar și pentru a contribui la problemele de mediu cu care societatea actuală se confruntă. Consorțiul își propune să fie o platformă eficientă pentru toți membrii rețelei în vederea îndeplinirii responsabilității sociale, dar și un promotor global eficient pentru ceea ce înseamnă responsabilitatea socială universitară (University Social Responsibility Network).

Referindu-ne acum la implicarea universităților din țara noastră în proiecte care vizează responsabilitatea socială, putem afirma că există multe astfel de exemple. Unele dintre acestea beneficiază chiar de finanțare europeană, însă, în comparație cu instituțiile de învățământ superior din străinătate, de cele mai multe ori, vorbim despre proiecte punctuale, fără a exista obiective setate pe termen lung.

Primele două exemple de astfel de proiecte s-au desfășurat în zona învățământului superior medical și farmaceutic.

În anul 2016, în cadrul celei de-a VII-a ediție a Conferinței Naționale a Asociației Decanilor Facultăților de Medicină din România (ADFMR), găzduită de către Universitatea de Farmacie și Medicină *Iuliu Hațieganu* Cluj-Napoca a fost susținută și o dezbatere privind *Responsabilitatea socială a Facultăților de Medicină în contextul globalizării*, la acel moment, fiind în derulare un proiect privind creșterea responsabilității sociale în cadrul facultăților de medicină, din inițiativa și sub coordonarea Universității de Medicină și Farmacie „Grigore T. Popa” din Iași, reprezentanții acesteia afirmând că universitatea „și-a asumat ca misiune, pe lângă educație și cercetare și misiunea socială” (Universitatea de Medicină și Farmacie Grigore T. Popa din Iași).

În prezent, Universitatea de Farmacie și Medicină *Iuliu Hațieganu* Cluj-Napoca are în derulare proiectul *MEDPRACT - Competitivitate, performanță și responsabilitate socială prin stagii de practică medicală integrată*, proiect cofinanțat din Fondul Social European prin Programul Operațional Capital Uman 2014-2020 (Universitatea de Medicină și Farmacie *Iuliu Hațieganu* Cluj-Napoca), obiectivul general al proiectului fiind: „creșterea gradului de inserție profesională a 350 studenți de la Facultatea de Medicină din cadrul Universității de Medicină și Farmacie „*Iuliu Hațieganu*” Cluj-Napoca (specializările Medicină, Asistență Medicală Generală și Balneofiziokinetoterapie și recuperare) prin dezvoltarea competențelor profesionale și abilităților clinice necesare în viitoarea carieră medicală, ca urmare a participării la activități integrate de pregătire practică, consiliere și orientare profesională axată pe dezvoltarea competențelor transversale, acțiuni de inovare și responsabilitate socială”.

Un alt exemplu este cel al Facultății de Psihologie și Științele Educației din cadrul Universității din București, care a fost implicată într-o serie de proiecte de responsabilitate socială. Informații despre proiectele de responsabilitate socială se găsesc pe pagina de internet a instituției, la butonul dedicat: Responsabilitate Socială (Facultatea de Psihologie și Științele Educației - Universitatea din București). Dintre proiectele respective amintim: *De-a arhitectura în orașul meu – educație pentru arhitectură și mediu construit*, proiect dezvoltat în cadrul programului cultural *De-a arhitectura, deschiderea școlărilor către arhitectură și mediu construit*, al Ordinului arhitecților din România, filiala București, prin care s-a încercat familiarizarea elevilor cu noțiuni de arhitectură și urbanism și explorarea modalităților prin care mediul construit poate fi îmbunătățit și Proiectul *Zburd – Educație prin coaching în licee* derulat în licee cu profil industrial din București, Iași, Brașov, Sibiu, Câmpulung Muscel, care au înregistrat o rată de promovare la examenul de Bacalaureat de sub 20% și ai căror elevi provin, în mare parte, din medii defavorizate, și-a propus să găsească soluții și să implementeze măsuri pentru o școală mai bună, prin implicarea în activitățile proiectului a studenților.

Și Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai din Cluj-Napoca ne-a atras atenția prin proiectele sale de responsabilitate socială. În acest sens, *Universitatea vârstei a treia (U3A)*

este un proiect prin care cadrele didactice universitare clujene și-au propus să ajute seniorii prin oferirea unor programe de educație informală, iar pe parcursul anului universitar 2019-2020 au reușit să abordeze o serie de teme precum: *Orașe prietenoase și accesibile pentru vârsta a treia*, *Nutriție: Cum să mâncăm sănătos?*, *Social media și Fake news* sau *Un creier tânăr la orice vârstă* (Fundatia Alma Mater Napocensis - Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai).

Un ultim exemplu de activități de responsabilitate socială universitară din țara noastră aparține Universității din Craiova și se încadrează pe linia problemelor de mediu cu care societatea modernă se confruntă. Proiectul *Clear-Air Oltenia*, derulat prin Facultatea de Științe, Departamentul de Fizică, are în vedere extinderea unei rețele de senzori de particule, deja existente în municipiul Craiova și atrage atenția asupra importanței calității aerului respirat de către locuitorii din zona Olteniei (Clear Air Craiova).

După cum se poate observa, spectrul abordărilor de responsabilitate socială este destul de larg. Universitățile se implică în diferite zone de interes, pe diferite componente sociale sau pentru susținerea diferitelor categorii de populație. Prin implicarea universităților în astfel de proiecte, de multe ori, pot fi deschise căi de acțiune de către administrațiile locale, astfel încât acestea să elaboreze chiar strategii coerente care să vină în întâmpinarea diverselor nevoi ale comunităților. Fie că e vorba de resurse materiale implicate, fie că e vorba de alte tipuri de resurse, cum ar fi resursele umane sau informaționale, universitățile se pot transforma în adevărați vectori ai schimbării sociale și a implementării unor soluții viabile la problemele comunitare.

### **Studiu de caz: Facultatea de Științe Socio-Umane din cadrul Universității „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu**

Începând cu anul 2016, în cadrul Facultății de Științe Socio-Umane din cadrul Universității „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu, studenții și profesorii au pus bazele conectării sistematice cu actorii comunității sibiene. În fapt, una din direcțiile de acțiune la nivel managerial a fost implicarea în comunitate și dezvoltarea de parteneriate care să contribuie la înmulțirea inițiativelor de dezvoltare a comunității. Această direcție de acțiune a fost una eminamente de responsabilitate socială, așa cum reiese din definirea conceptului. Acțiunile s-au concentrat pe două dimensiuni: pe de o parte, proiecte organizate de comunitatea academică din facultate, iar, pe de altă parte, proiecte organizate de partenerii sau de alți stakeholderi de la nivel local, în care facultatea s-a implicat.

La început, o serie de activități au fost organizate punctual, fără a fi integrate într-un context mai larg, de tip program sau proiect. De asemenea, alte activități s-au conectat cu proiecte mai vechi organizate la nivel local sau național. Din prima categorie putem menționa organizarea unor activități în care studenții și profesorii au participat la Free Hugs, îmbrățișări gratuite pentru cei care treceau, în intervalul orar stabilit prin zona centrală a orașului. Acțiunea a marcat interacțiunea cu oamenii obișnuiți cu care studenții și profesorii facultății au intrat în contact, insistând pe

necesitatea interacțiunii nemediate în comunitate, pe comunicarea directă, pe dezvoltarea unei abordări în care, fiind aproape unii de alții, oamenii pot pune idei în dialog. Din cea de-a doua categorie putem menționa organizarea Shoe Box, cadoul din cutia de pantofi. Studenții și profesorii, alături de participanți din afara facultății, au pregătit cadouri cu obiecte achiziționate din fonduri personale, pentru copiii din familii nevoiașe din județ. Proiectul nu este unul exclusiv al facultății, el fiind unul cu o tradiție mai veche, organizat la nivel național.

După această perioadă în care acțiunile au fost organizate punctual, pentru a eficientiza și a echilibra și mai bine efortul și beneficiile, la nivelul facultății au fost gândite proiecte care să includă anumite activități subsumate unui scop comun, ori activități care să fie organizate recurent. De exemplu, în cadrul *Săptămânii Verzi*, un proiect realizat în colaborare cu Facultatea de Științe Economice a aceleiași universități, au fost derulate activități care au avut drept scop dezvoltarea la nivel comunitar a unei gândiri de tip ecologic. Sloganul acțiunii a fost „Refolosește, reciclează... Trăiește în armonie cu natura”, activitățile desfășurându-se la final de primăvară, moment în care studenții și profesorii au fost încurajați să folosească mai mult mijloace de deplasare ecologice, transportul în comun și să renunțe la folosirea mașinilor personale. La activitățile desfășurate au participat studenți și cadre didactice de la cele două facultăți menționate, dar și parteneri și membri ai comunității care au aflat despre activități din postările dedicate pe platformele de comunicare. Proiectul a beneficiat de vizualuri dedicate și a fost promovat pe paginile de internet și pe paginile rețelelor de socializare deținute de cele două facultăți. O serie de articole de presă din timpul evenimentului sau de după acesta au marcat inițiativa, dar și rezultatele acesteia (la prima ediție au participat peste 120 de persoane la diferitele activități propuse). Proiectul a continuat, iar în următorii ani a inclus și activități noi, cum ar fi: plantarea de puieti, acțiuni de ecologizare sau tură cu bicicletele în natură. Concret, programul a inclus vizionarea de filme documentare, diferite ateliere dedicate reciclării sau dezvoltării urbane sustenabile, realizate cu participarea diferiților parteneri comunitari ai facultăților, realizarea unor obiecte de mobilier instalate în facultăți (etajere, rafturi pentru cărți), care au fost construite de către studenți, profesori și membrii ai comunității folosind materiale reciclate. De asemenea, în cadrul proiectului a existat și un concurs care a constat într-o întrecere în numărul de pași făcut de către echipele participante. Astfel de acțiuni au avut darul de a contribui la conștientizarea problemelor de mediu cu care ne confruntăm, pentru a găsi, împreună, căi și modalități de abordare la nivel de comunitate, pornind de la premisa că doar în acest fel putem cu adevărat aborda probleme complexe cum este poluarea și necesitatea reciclării.

Un alt proiect al facultății a fost *Săptămâna Magică*. Acesta a inclus, cu timpul, activități realizate separate, iar astăzi este un proiect care se desfășoară anual și este organizat de câte o echipă de studenți în colaborare cu profesori. Proiectul se desfășoară la începutul lunii decembrie, înaintea vacanței de iarnă și include câteva activități importante: vizionarea de filme documentare sau artistice cu

tematică specifică, organizarea unor concerte de colinde pentru publicuri de interes (persoane vârstnice, copii din centre de plasament), achiziționarea, pregătirea și oferirea de cadouri pentru copii din familii cu venituri scăzute din județ. Proiectul are o pagină dedicată pe platforma Facebook, pagină care este actualizată în fiecare an de către studenții și profesorii care preiau sarcina organizatorică. Aici sunt postate evenimentele și vizualurile dedicate, informații de interes, modalități de colaborare pentru membrii comunității. La activitățile proiectului, pe lângă studenții și profesorii facultății, participă și partenerii tradiționali ai facultății, dar și membri ai comunității care află de activitățile organizate din postările de pe rețelele de socializare, din comunicatele de presă sau de pe site-ul de internet al facultății. Și acest proiect a fost reliefat în diferitele articole de presă apărute în ziarele locale, inițiativa fiind considerată de interes pentru comunitate.

Facultatea de Științe Socio-Umane s-a implicat și în diferitele proiecte care au venit dinspre comunitatea sibiană, fie ca partener activ, fie ca promotor al unor acțiuni punctuale.

În cazul proiectului „Măinile curate salvează vieți”, inițiat de către Spitalul de Pediatrie din Sibiu, în parteneriat cu Primăria Sibiu, Facultatea de Științe Socio-Umane a contribuit prin atât cu know-how (comunicarea către publicurile țintă, consilierea în privința realizării vizualurilor etc.), precum și cu voluntari care au participat la implementarea proiectului în grădinițe, școli și licee. Proiectul a avut ca obiectiv principal conștientizarea importanței igienei mâinilor și a riscurilor asociate nerespectării regulilor de igienă. Un alt obiectiv a fost formarea deprinderilor de spălare corectă a mâinilor. Voluntari instruiți de către cadre medicale, alături de aceștia din urmă, au prezentat tehnici corecte de igienizare a mâinilor. Acestea s-au realizat în fața copiilor și elevilor din instituții de învățământ din Sibiu.

Facultatea de Științe Socio-Umane a colaborat pentru o perioadă mai îndelungată cu un ONG profilat pe promovarea egalității de gen, prin combaterea, respectiv prevenirea violenței asupra femeii. Este vorba de Asociația pentru Libertate și Egalitate de Gen (A.L.E.G.). În urma parteneriatelor încheiate cu acest ONG, foarte activ la nivelul comunității sibiene, facultatea a participat la mai multe proiecte, printre care *Festivalul Egalității de Gen* și *Jurnaliști care fac diferența*. *Festivalul Egalității de Gen* este o eveniment recurent anual, menit să conștientizeze comunitatea locală cu privire la efectele devastatoare pe care nedreptatea, discriminarea și abuzurile de orice fel le pot produce. În cadrul evenimentului sunt organizate diferite ateliere, dezbateri prin care se atrage atenția asupra alternativelor de viață socială sănătoasă. Proiectul *Jurnaliști care fac diferența* și-a propus crearea unui ghid destinat practicii jurnalistice, realizat în urma dezbaterilor și a atelierelor organizate, ghid care să cuprindă principii de bază pentru relatarea responsabilă și obiectivă a faptelor de violență domestică sau intimă, prin eliminarea „senzaționalului” și a atacului la persoană, protejarea intimității și demnității umane, respectarea confidențialității celor implicați. La aceste proiecte, Facultatea de Științe Socio-Umane a participat prin promovarea acțiunilor în comunitatea academică, prin voluntarii și participanții

activi în cadrul atelierelor, meselor rotunde și dezbaterilor. De asemenea, reprezentanții acestui ONG, ca și ai altor asociații care activează în comunitatea sibiană, au fost invitați pentru a-și prezenta proiectele în fața studenților, posibili voluntari implicați în respectivele proiecte, cu ocazia diverselor manifestări științifice sau culturale din facultate. Una din aceste manifestări este Săptămâna de Orientare, un proiect dedicat studenților din anul I, aflați la începutul ciclului de licență, cu scopul acomodării mai facile a acestora la noul mediu de studiu, cu surmontarea diferențelor dintre mediul preuniversitar și universitar.

În urma implicării în astfel de activități, pe cele două dimensiuni, proiectele pornite de Facultatea de Științe Socio-Umane, respectiv, proiectele pornite de parteneri ai facultății și în care a fost implicată comunitatea academică, putem afirma că interesul în rândul publicurilor țintă a crescut mai ales atunci când activitățile au fost gândite ca proiecte complexe, structurate în jurul unei idei generoase, cum a fost proiectul *Săptămâna Magică*. Considerăm că, în acest fel, gradul de implicare în activități de acest gen ar putea crește în viitor. De asemenea, la acest gen de proiecte au aderat relativ ușor și reprezentanți ai comunității locale care au susținut sau participat concret la activitățile din cadrul proiectelor.

## Concluzii

Conceptul de responsabilitate socială este foarte important astăzi. Pornit dinspre domeniul economic, acolo unde diferitele companii se implică pentru rezolvarea unor probleme punctuale ale comunității, investind o parte a profitului în acest sens, poate fi de interes și în zona sistemului universitar din România. Proiectele complexe ar putea coagula implicare și participare mai importantă decât acțiuni punctuale. Implicându-se în astfel de proiecte sau, mai bine, generând astfel de proiecte de CSR, universitățile din România pot deveni adevărați vectori de schimbare socială. De asemenea, prin intermediul acestor proiecte, în parteneriat cu administrațiile locale, de exemplu, universitățile ar putea contribui concret la rezolvarea unor provocări cu care se confruntă comunitățile locale.

Pornind de la exemple de practici de responsabilitate socială și de la studiul de caz propus, considerăm că existența unui buget la nivel național, care să fie distribuit universităților în urma unei competiții, la fel ca în proiectele de cercetare, ar putea reprezenta resursa materială extrem de importantă prin care universitățile din România ar putea propune proiecte competitive, pe termen mediu și lung, cu obiective clare și ușor de urmărit în ceea ce privește implementarea. Unele municipalități, cum este și cazul Sibiului, au bugete dedicate pentru propunerile venite de la comunitate (Agenda Culturală, Agenda Sportivă etc.). Astfel de inițiative, care vizează bugetarea participativă la nivelul comunităților locale, par a se multiplica în ultima vreme, în România. Universitățile pot aplica la astfel de proiecte, dar practica aceasta nu este generalizată. Una dintre constatările noastre este aceea că unele universități din România au derulat diferite proiecte cu fonduri europene, altele prin finanțări provenite de la diverse fundații, existând și cazuri în care, în lipsa vreunei finanțări,

s-a optat totuși pentru derularea unor proiecte cu implicare voluntară. Prin urmare, o competiție națională, cu un buget dedicat, cu reguli clare și cu termene și raportări asemănătoare cu competițiile de cercetare organizate, ar putea ajuta substanțial la implementarea unor soluții pentru rezolvarea provocărilor comunitare. Pe lângă calitatea actului educațional, care rămâne principala preocupare a universităților, implicarea în comunitate și rezultatele concrete ar putea fi un punct extrem de important pe agenda universităților românești.

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# Stakeholder Involvement in Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions: Turning Wishful Thinking into Reality

*Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică*

*Prof. dr. eng., University  
Politehnica of Bucharest  
Vicepresident, ARACIS  
cristina.ghitulica@aracis.ro*

*Radu-Mircea Damian*

*Prof. dr. eng., Technical University  
of Civil Engineering Bucharest  
Director, International relations,  
projects, cooperation and research,  
ARACIS  
radu.damian@aracis.ro*

**Abstract:** *The analysis presented in the paper aims to investigate the viewpoints of different categories of stakeholders from Romania related to their effective engagement in quality assurance activities in higher education. There are also highlighted a few elements on the time evolution of this problem in the European Higher Education Area, as they are reflected in the documents of the Bologna Process, in correlation with the missions of higher education. The data were obtained using a questionnaire, sent in Romania to different categories of stakeholders, under the framework of the project “Effective Involvement of Stakeholders in External Quality Assurance Activities” – ESQA, co-financed by the Erasmus + Program, coordinated by the Ministry of Education of Romania in which ARACIS was a partner. The presented results show some differences between the level of agreement with the proposals aiming to ensure the effective participation of stakeholders in quality assurance activities. Thus, respondents representing categories of stakeholders from outside the academic communities, who are not well-informed about this concept, for instance, employers, expressed their intention to participate but mentioned some constraints, especially the lack of time for engaging in activities beyond their professional duties. The data served to draft and adopt by ARACIS of an Action Plan, aiming to stimulate stakeholders' genuine and effective engagement in higher education quality assurance.*

**Keywords:** *higher education, quality assurance, Bologna process, stakeholders, Survey on stakeholders' engagement in quality assurance of education*

**Rezumat:** *Scopul analizei prezentate în lucrare este de a investiga punctele de vedere exprimate de diversele categorii de părți interesate (“stakeholders”) din România, cu privire la angajarea lor eficientă în activități de asigurare a calității*

educației învățământului superior. Sunt evidențiate totodată și câteva elemente privind evoluția în timp a acestei probleme în Spațiul European al Învățământului Superior, așa cum rezultă din documentele programatice ale procesului Bologna, în corelare cu misiunile învățământului superior. Datele au fost obținute pe baza unui chestionar, difuzat în România către diferite categorii de părți interesate, în cadrul proiectului “Implicarea Eficace a Părților Interesate în Activități Externe de Asigurare a Calității – ESQA”, co-finanțat prin Programul Erasmus+, coordonat de Ministerul Educației din România, în care ARACIS a avut calitatea de partener. Rezultatele, prezentate în detaliu, arată că există diferențe între nivelurile de acceptare a propunerilor menite să asigure o participare eficientă a părților interesate la activitățile de asigurare a calității. Astfel, respondenții din afara comunităților academice, care sunt mai puțin informați asupra acestui concept, ca de exemplu angajatorii, menționează că sunt dispuși să se implice, dar își exprimă și anumite rezerve, legate în special de lipsa timpului necesar pentru a se implica în activități în afara obligațiilor lor profesionale. Datele obținute au servit la structurarea și adoptarea de către ARACIS a unui plan de activitate, menit să stimuleze participarea reală și eficientă a părților interesate la asigurarea calității învățământului superior.

**Cuvinte cheie:** învățământ superior, asigurarea calității, procesul Bologna, părți interesate, chestionar privind implicarea părților interesate în asigurarea calității educației

## 1. Introduction: “Quality of Education” vs “Quality Assurance of Institutions”?

The concept of “Quality of education” has been widely discussed, but it still raises some contradictory opinions, mainly related to “Quality assurance”. One interesting reference to the quality of education may be found in Yin Cheong Cheng, Wai Ming Tam, (1997). One major statement of the authors is that “Policies issued to implement educational changes for education quality often fail because of lack of comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of education quality in schools or higher education institutions”. They introduce nine educational models for quality education and conclude that “... these models can form a comprehensive framework for understanding and conceptualizing quality in education from different perspectives and facilitating the development of management strategies for achieving it”.

Thus, the difference between “quality of education” as a comprehensive set of points of view, definitions and expectations, and “quality assurance” as an ongoing quality enhancement process is an essential point to be underlined. Quality assurance is a process aiming to achieve a better “quality of education,” which may be defined in connection with any selected model or as a more comprehensive framework. Moreover, with the broad coverage in the media of university rankings, this difference is not very well clearly understood by stakeholders who, in many cases, identify the

quality of education with the results of one ranking or another. Therefore, it is to be underlined that most rankings are more related to some quality model and show a static image at one time moment. This becomes obvious especially when research comes into the definition of quality, leading to rankings of universities in categories related to scientometrics' indicators that are research results-focused and thus less concerned about "*the multiple concomitant purposes of preparation for the labour market, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, personal development and the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of an advanced, comprehensive and diverse knowledge base*" of the higher education, as per Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the public responsibility for higher education and research (2007). To overcome the challenge of this complex interaction of concepts and public's / stakeholders' perception and for more clarity, in interpreting information on universities, the *U Multirank project* was developed for European universities (2008) and then implemented thereon globally with voluntary participation of HE institutions. This project uses the idea of "classification" of institutions, based on their similarities, and only then their ranking according to several criteria.

While the role of quality assurance of institutions is recognized and the process remains globally a priority, there are not very many references to qualitative and quantitative results reflected in "quality of higher education". A discussion on the impact evaluation of quality assurance may be found in Radu Damian, Josep Grifoll & Anke Rigbers (2015). This lack of empirical data may be a severe drawback in engaging stakeholders' representatives in external QA.

One of the few relevant examples in assessing the effects of QA in HEIs remains the EU-funded project *Impact analysis of external quality assurance processes of higher education institutions. Pluralistic Methodology and Application of a Formative Transdisciplinary Impact Evaluation (IMPALA)* (2013-2016) of EVALAG, Project Reference: 539481-LLP-1-2013-1-DE-ERASMUS-EIGF, with ARACIS and the Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest among the project partners. The overall results of the project can be found in Leiber (editor) (2019), while in the Romanian context, details are published in Bejan and all (2018).

## **2. The "Bologna Process" and QA: How All Stakeholders Could Make the Most of its Results?**

The "reform" of higher education in Europe, known as the "Bologna process", initiated with the "Bologna Declaration" (1999), has become over the years more and more comprehensive and complex. The 2010 Budapest-Vienna ministerial conference was an important milestone, marking the creation of the European Higher Education Area - EHEA (2010), which has become a wide area of "competitive cooperation" of European universities, where EU and non-EU countries sharing the common values of the European Cultural Convention of the Council of

Europe (1954) are all represented. Every two or three years, there are Ministerial Conferences organized to assess the progress made within the EHEA and decide on the new steps to be taken. The Bologna Follow-up Group - BFUG (2003) oversees the Bologna Process between the ministerial meetings. The BFUG meetings play an essential role in overseeing the implementation of the ministerial Communiqués and developing the Bologna Process. EHEA/BFUG members include 49 countries and the European Commission - EC. The developments of structural reforms and shared tools of the Bologna process have become a reference for higher education systems worldwide.

In the Bucharest ministerial Communiqué (2012), the ministers responsible for higher education affirmed: *“We commit to both maintaining the public responsibility for **quality assurance and involving a wide range of stakeholders in this development actively**”*. In the Paris Communiqué (2018), the ministers stated that *“Fulfilling our commitments depends on the concerted efforts of **national policy-makers, public authorities, institutions, staff, students and other stakeholders as well as coordination at EHEA level**”*. On The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - [ENQA website](#), one may find that *“The Standards and guidelines for **quality assurance** in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG) provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance. They were revised and adopted at the Yerevan Ministerial Conference (2015). ENQA worked in partnership with the rest of the E4 Group ([EUA](#), [EURASHE](#) and [ESU](#)), other stakeholder organizations ([Education International](#), [Business Europe](#)), and with [EQAR](#) to draft the ESG 2015. The E4 Group was also the author of the original version of the ESG in 2005. Implementing quality assurance in line with the ESG is one of the key commitments of the Bologna Process. As such, the ESG provide the basis for enhancing trust, mobility and recognition between higher education systems.”*

As the BFUG is the executive structure supporting the Bologna Process in-between the Ministerial Conferences, its role is crucial for implementing the educational policy commitments of the ministers. Under the framework of BFUG, three Bologna thematic peer-learning groups (TPLs) have been created. The contribution of TPLs in the implementation phase has been recognized by the EC, providing projects-based financial support.

After discussing several topics of interest in their 2018 meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia, the Bologna thematic peer-learning group TPL C on *Quality Assurance* members identified the theme *“Role and engagement of stakeholders in internal and external quality assurance”* as being one in which work still has to be done in the member countries. Therefore, the Romania-initiated project *“Effective Involvement of Stakeholders in External Quality Assurance Activities (ESQA)”*, project number 607068-EPP-1-2018-1-RO-EPPKA3\_BOLOGNA, was co-funded in the framework of the ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Union and the Romanian Ministry of Education (2018-2021).

The Romanian Ministry of Education led the project consortium as the national authority. It included three European organizations representing quality assurance agencies - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ENQA, universities - European Association of Institutions in Higher Education - EURASHE and students - European Students' Union - ESU and five quality assurance agencies from Romania (ARACIS), France (High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education - HCERES), Bulgaria (National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency - NEAA), Denmark (The Danish Accreditation Institution - DAI) and Republic of Moldova (National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research - ANACEC). The „Study on stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance” was authored by Miljia Homan, Jakub Grodecki and Vaidotas Viliunas (2020). The study results are published on the ENQA webpage (2020), but they can also be found on EURASHE and ARACIS webpages. In addition, the study was published by the Ministry of Education of Romania and the ESQA project in paper format (2020).

One discussion on stakeholders' categories and the understandings of the term in the Romanian and international context may also be found in Daniela-Cristina Ghitulica and Radu-Mircea Damian, The “Study on Stakeholder Involvement in External Quality Assurance” Brings in New Challenges for Higher Education, (2020).

The results of the project confirmed that the categories of stakeholders involved or who should be involved in external QA processes and activities are students, alumni, employers, teaching staff, other staff of HEIs, teachers' unions, students' unions, professional bodies, university associations, national HE authority, local authorities, civil society as well as others, considered as specific by some respondents.

Following the findings of the study, the “Guide for effective stakeholders' involvement in QA”, authored by Julien Bollaert and Stefan Delplace (2020), became an essential outcome of the project, where quality assurance agencies could consider many possible answers on how to make this commitment effective and applied in their activity shortly. The Guide was translated into Romanian and published by ARACIS in paper format and online (2020). The proposals included in the Guide served as a starting point of a needs analysis based on the ten selected discussion *Themes* to support the action plans of agencies for the next period. The needs analysis of ARACIS was made public and disseminated to different categories of stakeholders as a questionnaire/survey. The stakeholders were asked to share their opinions with the Agency on the proposals to be included in its action plan.

### **3. Analysis of the Results of the ARACIS Survey in Romania**

The results of the analysis of the responses received from the *Survey on the actions for more effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities of ARACIS* (2021) under the framework of the ESQA project were also reported as part of the project outputs.

The purpose of the Survey was to find out the stakeholders' views to identify new lines of action that ARACIS can pursue to increase stakeholder involvement in its external QA activity. The questionnaire/survey was sent to stakeholders in the higher education and quality assurance area and other stakeholders, such as representatives of students and teachers, employers, public institutions, civil society, mass media.

Stakeholders were invited to review the analysis and action proposals, available at [https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ARACIS-Analysis-of-the-needs-for-change\\_ESQA-Project\\_May-2021.pdf](https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ARACIS-Analysis-of-the-needs-for-change_ESQA-Project_May-2021.pdf), as well as the *Guide for effective stakeholders' involvement in quality assurance activities*

Paragraph 3.1 introduces comprehensive data on participants and respondents. The presentation of results, presented in paragraph 3.2, follows the order, notations and phrasing used in the Survey to avoid a redundant presentation of the questionnaire/survey itself.

### 3.1 Overall Data of the Number of Responses

The total number of persons who accessed the questionnaire/survey was **103**, while the maximum number of responses to all questions was **97**. The number of responses received for some of the questions was smaller.

**The respondents came from 52 institutions**, from the categories mentioned below (some institutions provided more responses, such as teaching staff and/or university administrators), with students presented separately.

The percentage of responses out of the total number of persons who accessed the Survey was **94.17%**

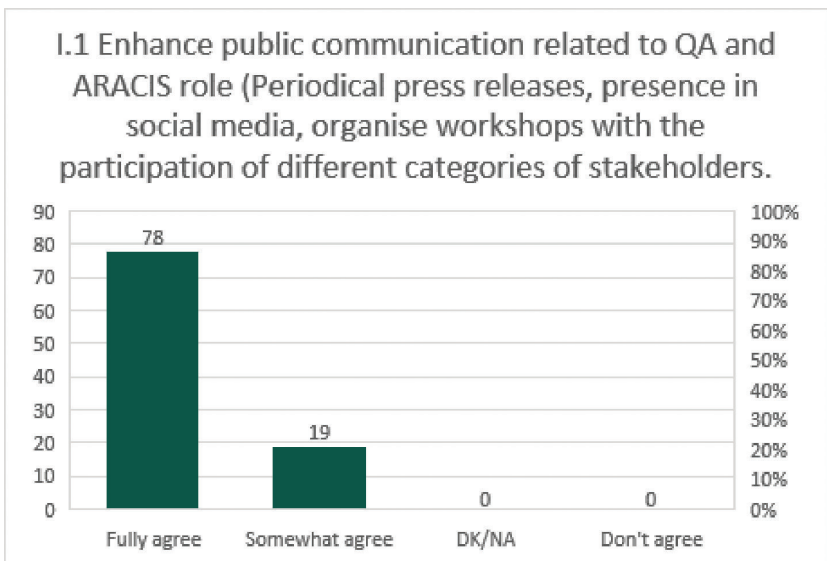
In the total number of **52** contacted institutions that responded, the categories are the following: 32 (61.5%) universities, out of which **20** public and **12** private ones; **3** (5.8%) research institutes; **14** (26.9%) Employers, **14**, out of which **two** representatives of media institutions; **3** (5.8%) other institutions.

The number of students/student associations that responded is **24** (**24.7%** out of the total number of respondents (97)).

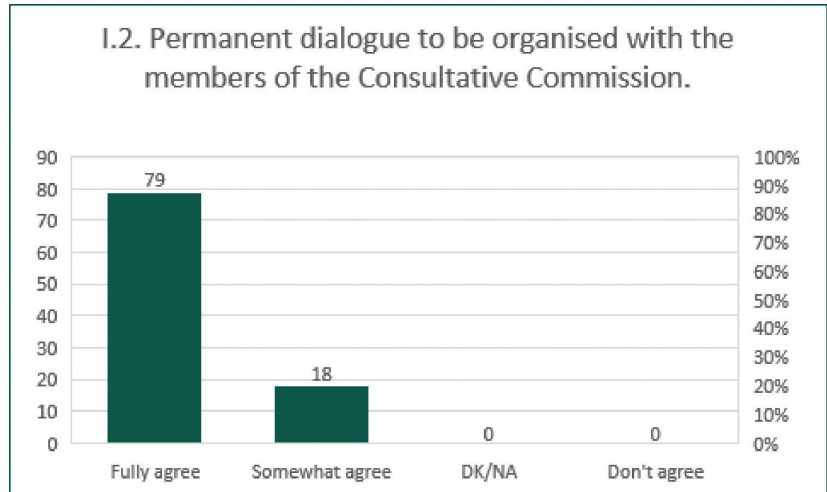
### 3.2 Overview of the Responses (Total Number of Validated Responses: 97)

This presentation covers the respondents' answers in both image and tabular forms per subject to facilitate an overall image. The opinions and proposals of respondents are presented directly to the reader for each critical question, in tabular form, including the category of the respondent(s). Other proposals and opinions are listed at the end of the subject-type presentation of answers. This approach is justified by the fact that the size of the sample was not very large, so it might raise problems of significance and confidence when attempting to generalize the answers. However, the answers were considered valuable and relevant as a basis for the Action plan of the Agency. Some authors' remarks are introduced in tables only as clarification, for instance, when some identical proposal comes from respondents working together in the same institution.

**Subject I. Sharing underlying concepts of quality in higher education and quality assurance systems**



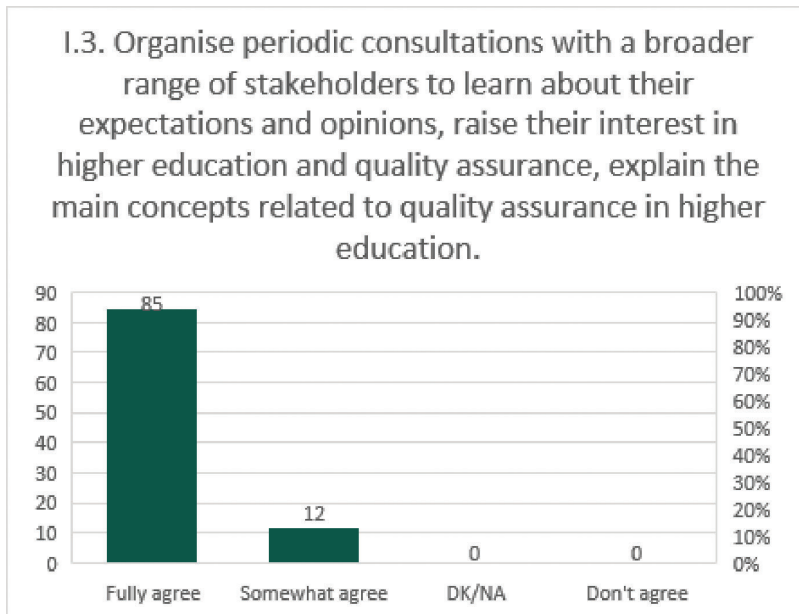
Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
78 (80.40%)	19 (19.60%)	-	-



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
79 (81.40%)	18 (18.60%)	-	-

*\*The Consultative Commission of ARACIS represents the interests of higher education institutions, enhancing mutual collaboration, aiming to develop and implement adequate evaluation and QA activities, thus meeting the needs of*

universities in quality assurance. Furthermore, the commission members assist the institutional evaluation panels in the quality assurance activity, offer an objective and transparent opinion on the process, and are included in the commissions solving the appeals of higher education institutions.



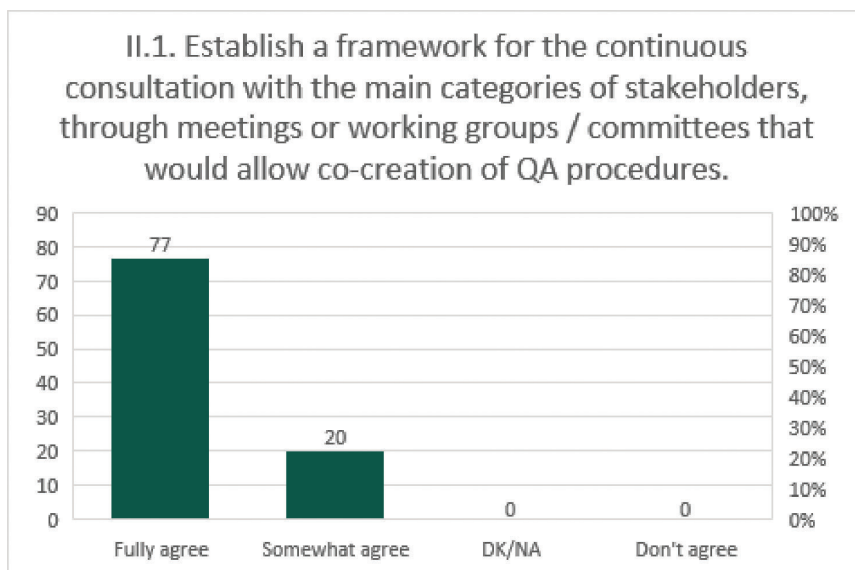
Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
85 (87.60%)	12 (12.40%)	-	-

### OTHER PROPOSALS

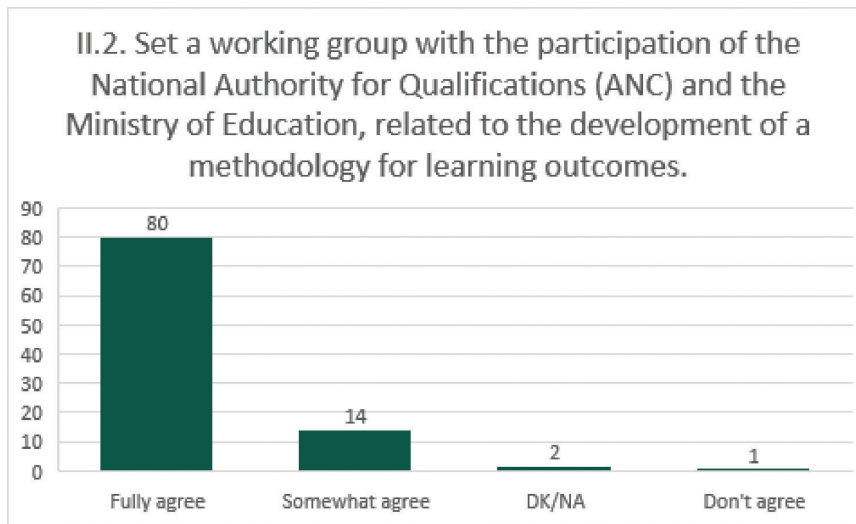
From (respondents)	Proposal	Authors' Remarks
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Delineate research activities and educational activities.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Consult the religious denominations that organized confessional higher education institutions.	*) From several people from the same confessional higher education institutions, similar proposals were received for all the questions.
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Each university is a distinct entity. It is essential to take into account the specificity, the mission, and the objectives of each university - especially the dogmatic and canonical specificity of confessional universities.	

Student	I agree with any meetings where issues are discussed and debated and new ideas are shared for the improvement of higher education in Romania.	
Employer	A more active presence of ARACIS in the public space by participating in interviews debates in the mass media (more than press releases, which nobody believes).	
Employer	Include representatives of the Employers, as stakeholders, in the membership of the Consultative Commissions (the representatives to be appointed by the employers based on specific professional criteria), to communicate the needs related to educating and training students to reach the objective “current students, future employees, with specific skills, built for a specific Employer, based on a list of demands, defined through the portfolio of actions, in correlation with the institutional development policy and strategy.”	
Employer	A more significant opening towards employers would essentially contribute to a more accurate evaluation of universities in Romania.	

**Subject II.** Diversity of categories of stakeholders and their different roles, especially in consultations.



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/No answer	Disagree
77 (79.40%)	20 (20.6%)	-	-



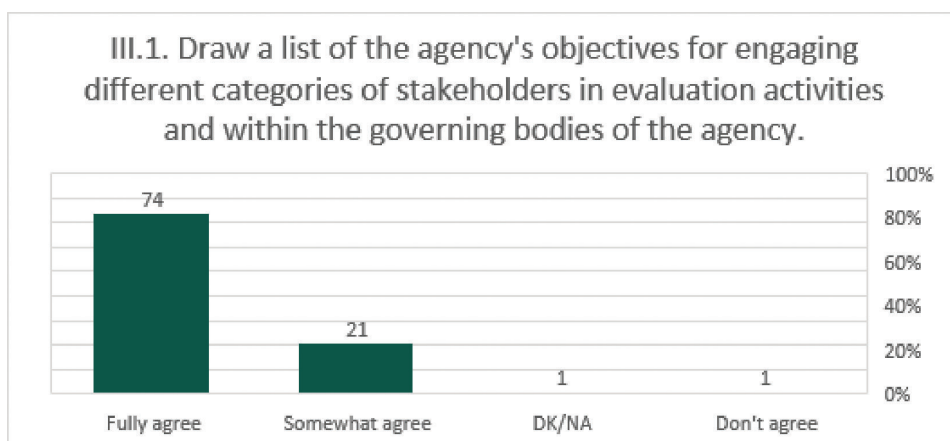
Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/No answer	Disagree
80 (82.5%)	14 (14.4%)	2 (2.1%)	(1%)

### OTHER PROPOSALS

From (respondents)	Proposal	Authors' Remarks
Permanent expert, employers' representative, in commission C10	Maintain a continuous dialogue with the business environment.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Observe the confessional, dogmatic and canonical specificity within universities, according to the concept of university autonomy and the provisions of the National Education Law no. 1/2011, as subsequently amended and supplemented.	<i>*) From several people from the same confessional higher education institutions, similar proposals were received for all the questions.</i>
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	The quality assurance agency should use public forms in the evaluation activities, available for all evaluated institutions.	<i>Such forms are in place, and they are public</i>
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Correlate the ANC database, in terms of the validation and registration of the qualifications in the RNCIS, with the ARACIS database, starting from the structure of the higher education institutions, approved by Government Decisions or by Ministerial Orders.	

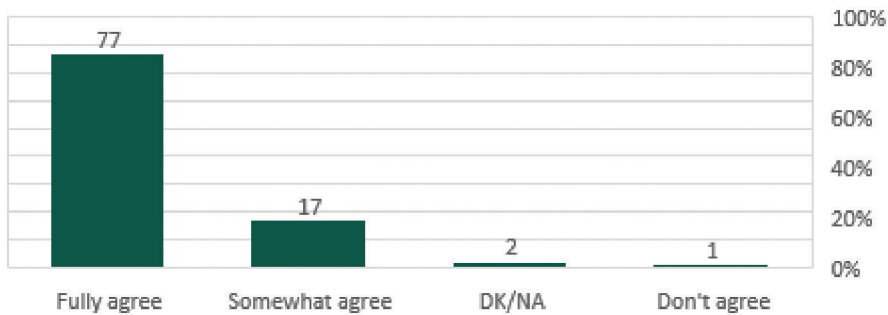
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	I propose to avoid excessive bureaucratization by creating a large number of commissions that will propose a multitude of surveys and consultations, which can take an excessive amount of the time allocated for study and efficient interaction with the students. I think that graduates and employers have a vital role in these consultations.	
Employer	The working group should include universities too, but especially private universities if we want to have results after graduation, the future of education in the private sector. There is such a significant discrepancy between what we want and where we are because pupils/ students are enrolled in a public system for 15-17 years, and then they work in the private sector. When we hire them, we realize that they are disconnected from reality. We have much, much better experiences with graduates coming from private universities.	<i>Mass media employer - specialized in information related to the confessional education</i>
Employer	Create an extended Working Group to include representatives of the Employers, especially from among Employers who developed cooperation/ collaboration relationships based on partnerships and who can hire/have hired graduates.	

**Subject III. Objectives of stakeholders' involvement**



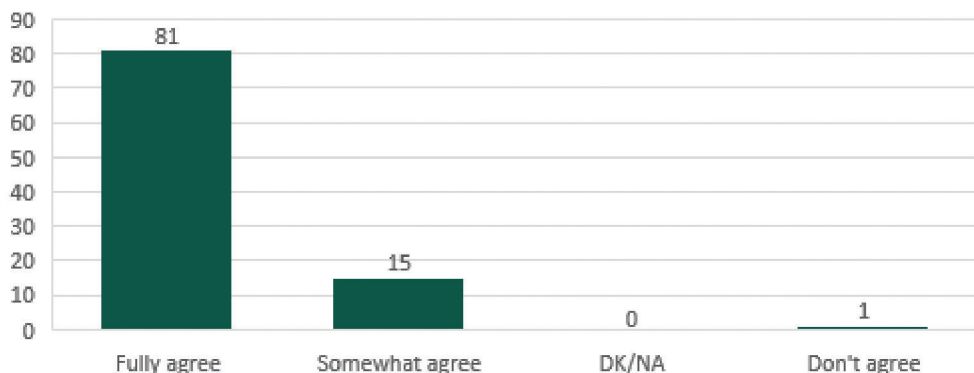
Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
74 (76.2%)	21 (21.8%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)

III.2. Prepare stakeholder-category tailored presentations of the objectives, in view of approaching the diverse categories in a clear and attractive manner, with reference to their role and involvement in external QA.



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
77 (79.4%)	17 (17.5%)	2 (2.1%)	1 (1%)

III.3. Develop and run a survey to investigate the expectations of different categories of stakeholders in what concerns their role in QA procedures.



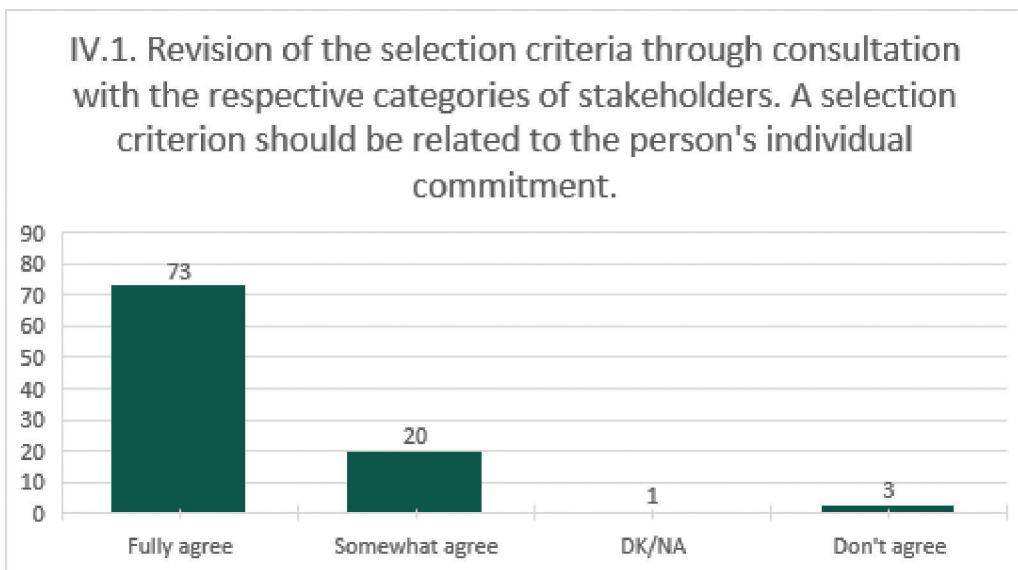
Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
81 (83.5%)	15 (15.5%)	-	1 (1%)

### OTHER PROPOSALS

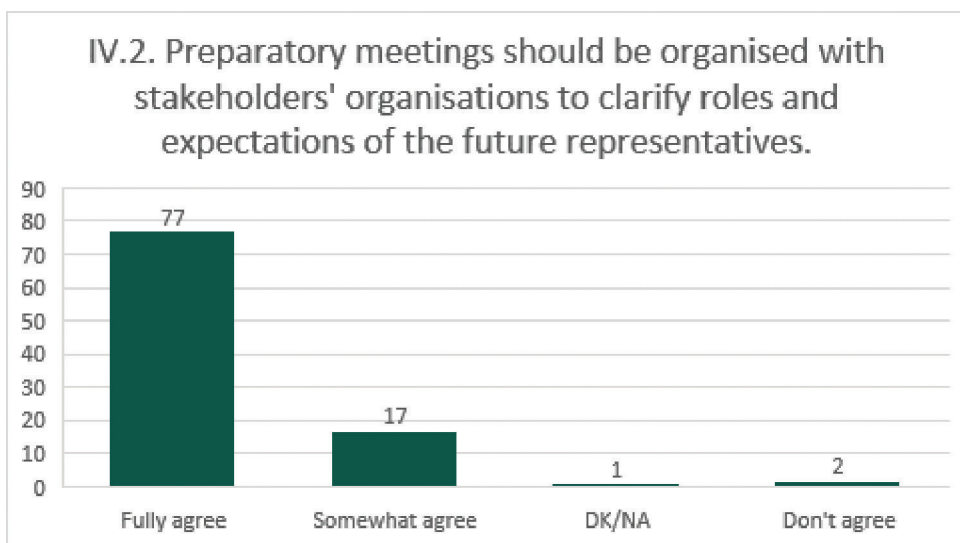
From (respondents)	Proposal	Authors' Remarks
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Collect best practices in quality assurance from universities in order to establish the objectives.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	We request the representatives of the recognized religious denominations that organize confessional higher education institutions to be involved.	*) <i>Proposals from several people from the same confessional higher education institutions received proposals for all the questions.</i>
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	We respectfully request that, based on university autonomy and while respecting the specificity of every higher education institution, universities can have a say in selecting the categories of stakeholders that will be involved in the evaluation processes, as well as in establishing the objectives that will be presented to them.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	The evaluation of each university should be simplified and rendered more efficient, depending on the specificity of each university. Homogenization with the risk of eliminating those elements that are specific may lead to a diminution of creativity in education.	
Student	I fully agree with any improvements that can be brought to our attention.	
Student	Outline some shared directions in the implementation of the educational process so that all stakeholders can benefit from it.	
Employer	Under the auspices of the Agency, organize meetings between employers and the higher education institution to continuously adapt the content of courses/seminars/laboratories to the current demands of the labour market.	
Employer	Maybe a survey is not enough; we believe a more detailed analysis could provide more information.	

Employer	<p>The main expectations of Employers as stakeholders are related to the needs in terms of training and preparing students, in line with achieving the objective “current students à future employees, with specific competencies correlated with the specificity of the Employer, the scope of business, the institutional development policy and strategy”.</p> <p>Communication must be mutual too, in the sense of achieving information feedback, from the employer to the Trainer/Higher Education Institution and the other way around, to ensure the compliance of curricula and vocational training with the needs established/expressed by each employer, and based on analyzing how students respond/get actively engaged in meeting these demands.</p> <p>To improve the process of integration of the students as future employees in the structure of the employer, and in order to develop (to the employer) the benefit of added value, given the experience accumulated by INCAS as an Employer, several stages are required for the students to become aware (1), (2-) and gradually involved (2+), (3), (4), (5) in the current activities of the employer, namely: 1/ volunteering, 2/ practical internship, 3/ applied research internship for supplementing/finalizing the Bachelor’s Project, for the bachelor studies cycle, 4/ applied research internship for finalizing the Dissertation for the master programme, 5/ applied research internship for supplementing/finalizing the significant chapters of the Doctoral thesis, for the doctoral study cycle.</p> <p>We mention that proposals (3), (4), (5) on applied research, specific for each long-term education cycle (bachelor, master and doctoral studies), are new elements meant to add value, meaning that the research topics proposed (by the higher education unit, as the Trainer) for the bachelor project/dissertation / doctoral thesis are correlated with the current research-development projects of the employer and that some of the research-development projects are carried out in a collaboration based on a partnership between the employer and the higher education institution/s.</p>	
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**Subject IV. Recruitment/selection of the stakeholders' representatives**



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
73 (75.3%)	20 (20.6%)	1 (1%)	3 (3.1%)



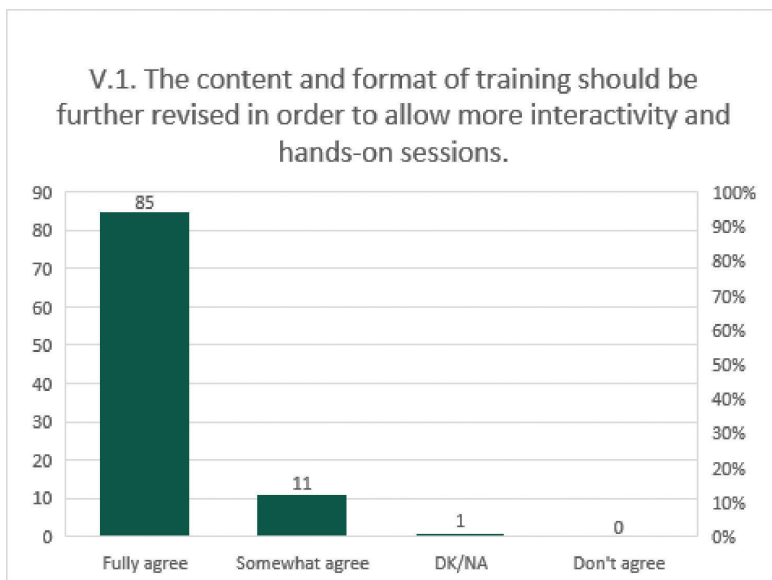
Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
77 (79.4%)	17 (17.5%)	1 (1%)	2 (2.1%)

## OTHER PROPOSALS

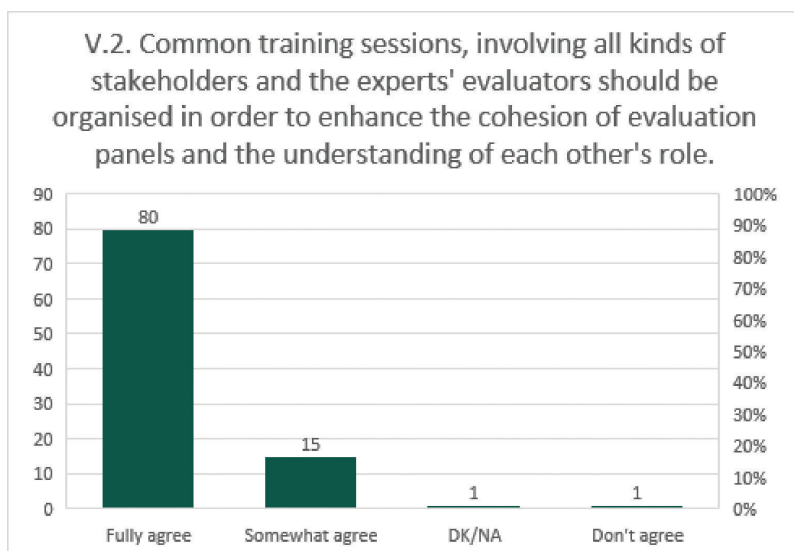
From (respondents)	Proposal	Authors' Remarks
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Representatives of private universities among the representatives of stakeholders, other than those coming from Bucharest private universities.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	It would be helpful to include the CEAC coordinators of universities among the stakeholders.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	I propose the categories of stakeholders to be defined clearly, namely higher education institutions and the employers of their graduates. Furthermore, universities should have the possibility to select their stakeholders.	<i>The stakeholders are defined in the ESG</i>
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	I propose that each university can propose persons familiar with the university's specific nature. In particular, have in mind confessional universities.	*) <i>Proposals from several people from the same confessional higher education institutions received proposals for all the questions.</i>
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	My suggestion is that the involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation of universities be in alignment with the role they play in the narrower context of the social, economic and - last, but not least - a religious environment, in the case of confessional universities.	
Employer	Preparatory meetings with employers are challenging to organize, and it is not easy to ensure relevant participation due to their large numbers and a wide variety. The roles of the representatives will be communicated to them on the occasion of the organized training activities, and their expectations are specific to the organization/industry they come from.	
Employer	Regarding the selection criteria for the persons who would represent stakeholders' interests, the vocational background, abilities, and experiences should be considered in terms of research development and the education system. Considering the mere personal employment, which only expresses the desire for personal involvement, is not sufficient and, in certain circumstances, it would not even be indicated. It is a priori assumption that a person who wants to represent these interests of the stakeholders will express	

	<p>their involvement at the same time; however, mere benevolence is not sufficient - competencies and skills are required as well, acquired both through education/training and experience.</p>	
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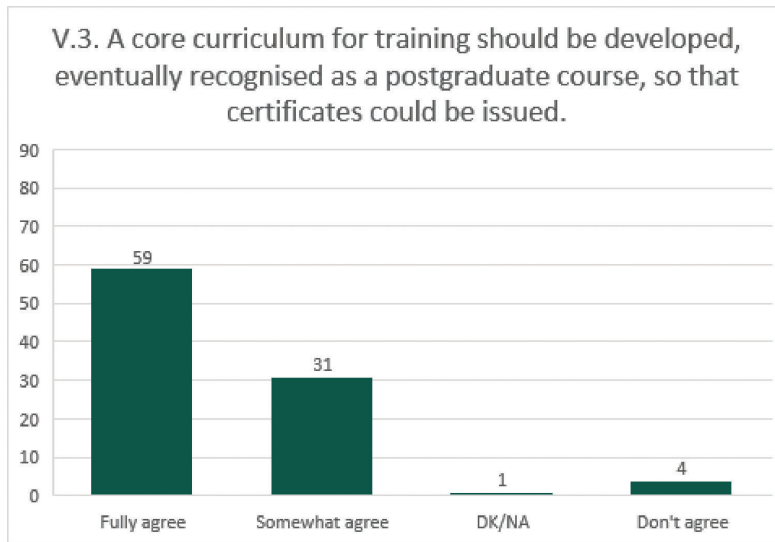
**Subject V. Training of stakeholders**



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
85 (87.6%)	11 (11.4%)	1 (1%)	-



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
80 (82.5%)	15 (15.5%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)



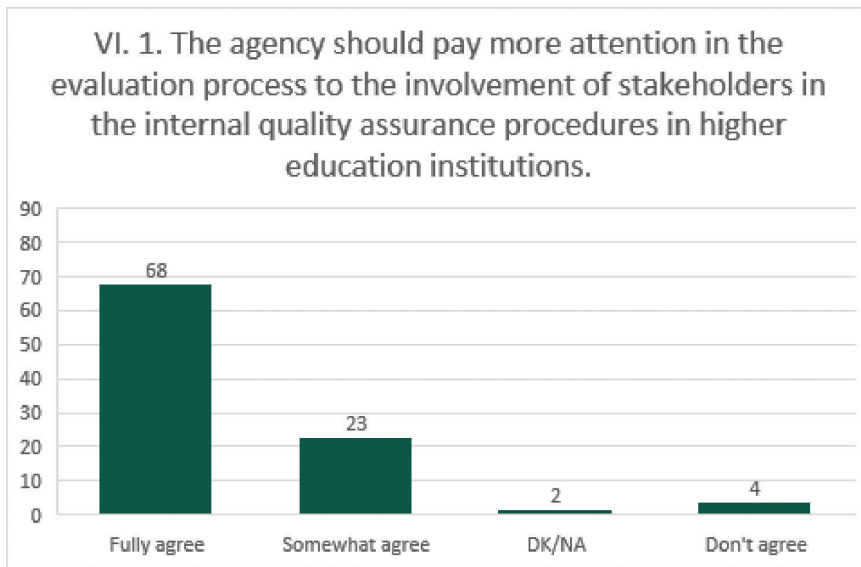
Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
59 (62.1%)	31 (32.7%)	1 (1%)	4 (4.2%)

*(Only 95 persons answered this question; non-responders: one person in the 'universities' category; one person in the 'research institutes' category)*

### OTHER PROPOSALS

From (respondents)	Proposal	Authors' Remarks
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Adopt some provisions of the American education system.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	In the case of students, I do not think a certificate of completion is in order because they have not completed their bachelor studies, but they could have credits added to their volunteering work portfolio.	

Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Respect the university's autonomy in proposing the disciplines of the common core of the curriculum. The specificity of the confessional universities should be kept in mind when establishing the curriculum for training these specialists.	<i>*) Proposals from several people from the same confessional higher education institutions received proposals for all the questions.</i>
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Train the evaluators and the members of the evaluated institution to ensure a HOMOGENEOUS approach to the standards.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Respect and encourage creativity and innovation in education, depending on the specificity of the university.	
Employer	Agree with the common core of the curriculum for training. But for students and employers, I do not think this could be deemed as a postgraduate course with graduation certificates issued because the knowledge is only necessary and valuable during the mandate as a member of the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions.	
Employer	Having a pragmatic approach on the curriculum would be desirable.	
Employer	The content and format of the training sessions must be updated regularly (once in 4 months or once in 6 months, correlated with the structure of the academic year) and correlated depending on the response coming from both directions (Employer to Trainer/higher education institution, and the other way around), per segments of informational feedback, in line with the compliance of the vocational training curricula with the needs established/expressed by each employer, and based on the analysis of how students integrate with the employer's structures, for the needs to be formulated at the current level of knowledge and professional abilities of the young employees.	

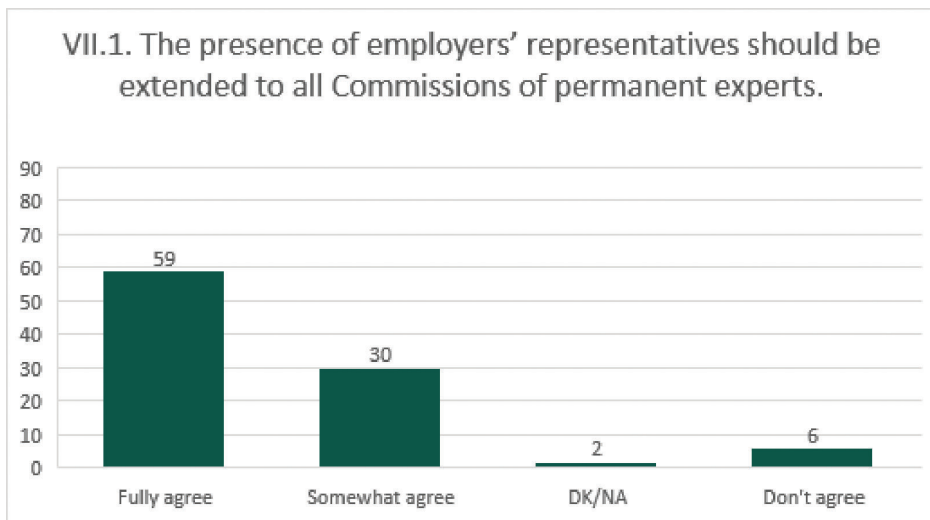
**Subject VI. Involvement of stakeholders in reviews**

Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
68 (70.1%)	23 (23.6%)	2 (2.1%)	4 (4.2%)

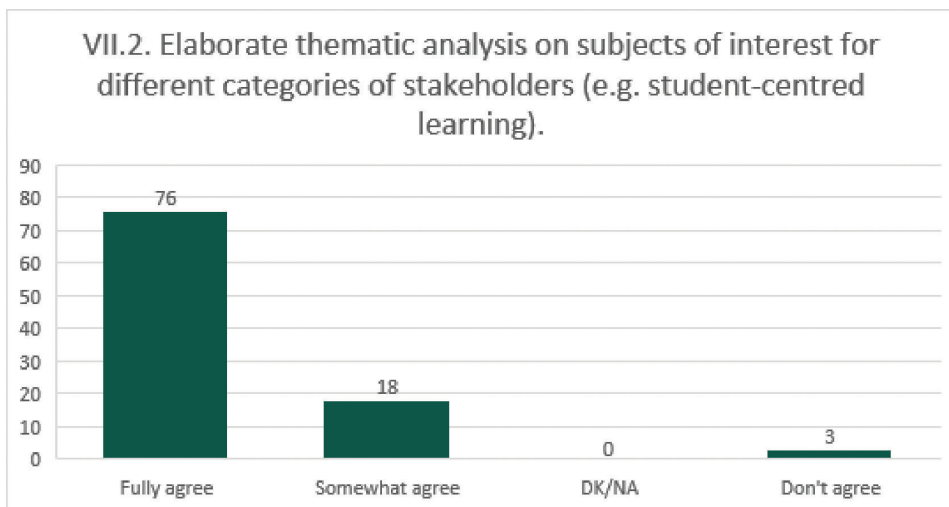
**OTHER PROPOSALS**

From (respondents)	Proposal	Authors' Remarks
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	I think that the opinions of the graduates and the employers of the university's graduates should be primarily taken into account.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Greater attention should be paid to the possible excessive bureaucratization of everything that the evaluation process entails, with all the participants involved in this activity. In time, this could prove to be counter-productive for a proper education and training process.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Provide a clear definition of "stakeholders" to avoid situations of people who are not familiar with the specificity of a university and the study programmes becoming experts by attending a course. Increased university autonomy is a crucial element for obtaining high performance in the international competition.	

**Subject VII.** *Involvement of stakeholders in the governance and organization of quality assurance agencies*



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
59 (60.8%)	30 (30.9%)	2 (2.1%)	6 (6.2%)



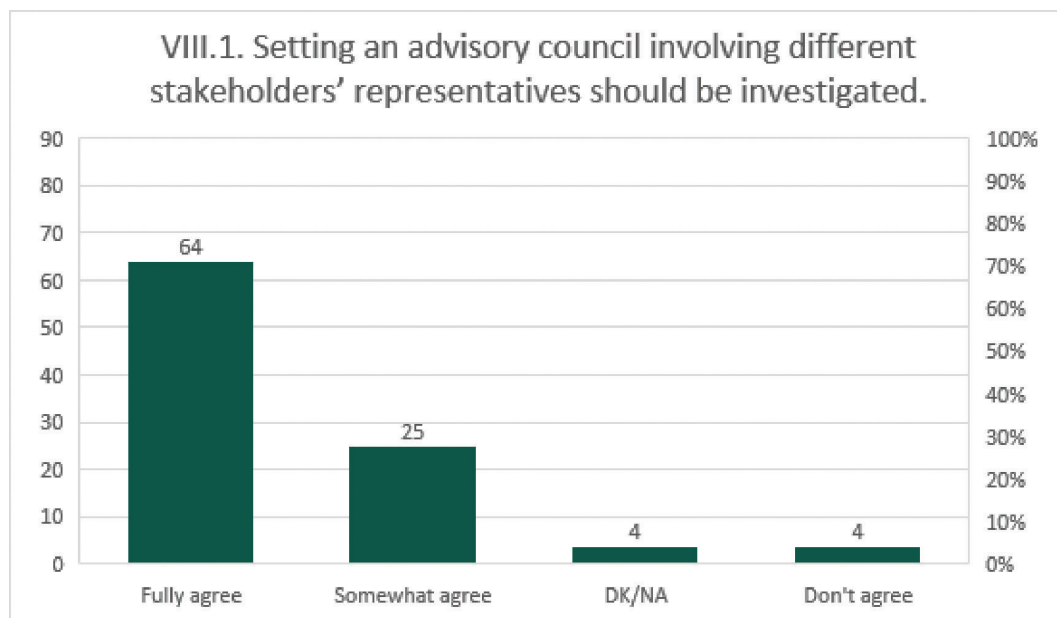
Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
76 (78.4%)	18 (18.5%)	-	3 (3.1%)

## OTHER PROPOSALS

From (respondents)	Proposal	Authors' Remarks
Permanent expert, employers' representative, in commission C10	Involvement of the employers' representatives should create added value, rather than being merely formal.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	The presence of employers is not necessary for all permanent speciality experts' commissions.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	The employers' representatives in the quality assurance commissions should be representative for each university and, in the case of confessional universities, they should be members of that religious denomination.	*) <i>Proposals from several people from the same confessional higher education institutions received proposals for all the questions.</i>
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	The evaluation should be adapted to the specificity of the education institution; the employers' recommendations concerning the mandatory introduction of specific disciplines that are not in the standards should be accepted, and there should be communication between the stakeholders.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	How would the employers' representatives be selected in all the permanent speciality experts' commissions (by pursuing national representativeness, by looking at the results obtained, the scope of business, the size, etc.)? Could their permanent availability be ensured for all the activities specific to the quality assurance agency?	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	The employers' representatives must be familiar with the specific standards for each domain. The entire evaluation process must be relevant, efficient, non-bureaucratic and apolitical.	

Employer	The possibility of implementing actual actions and actively involving the business environment in substantiating the educational requirements, in the drawing up of the study graduation works, and in the panels that evaluate how these objectives are achieved should be analyzed.	
Employer	We believe that learning is too student-centred; rather, it should be graduate-centred. What does the graduate know to do? What is their capacity in the labour market?	

**Subject VIII. Independence vis-a-vis of stakeholders' involvement**



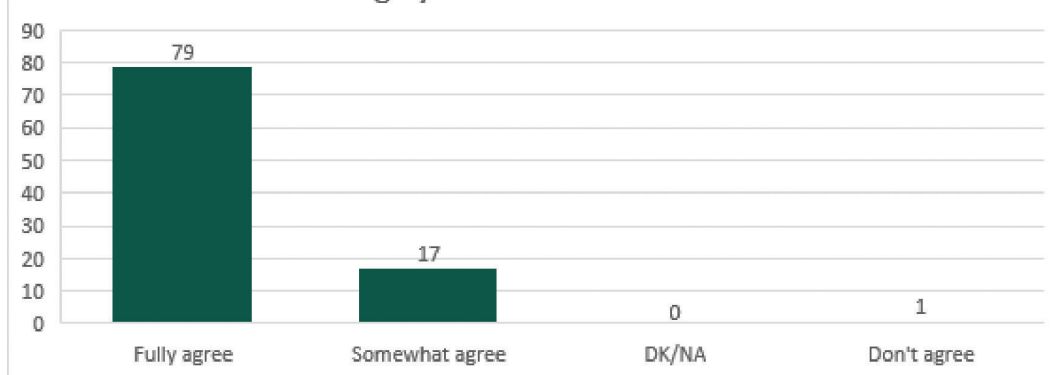
Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
64 (66%)	25 (25.6%)	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.2%)

## OTHER PROPOSALS

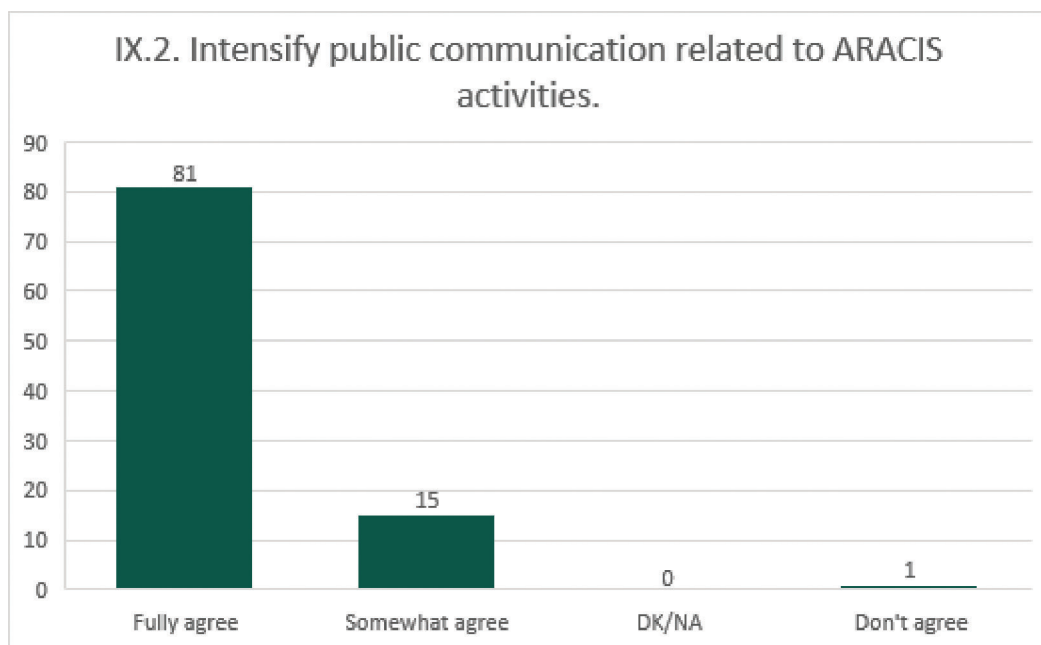
From (respondents)	Proposal	Authors' Remarks
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Representatives of private universities should be involved as well.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	In the case of employers, it was already proposed that they be part of the speciality commissions.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	We propose avoiding excessive bureaucratization in the quality evaluation process, as that would overwhelm the educational process in higher education institutions.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	A multitude of committees and commissions would lead to increased bureaucratization, and they would become costly and time-consuming.	
Employer	The advisory council is vital	

**Subject IX.** *Communication and transparency towards stakeholders*

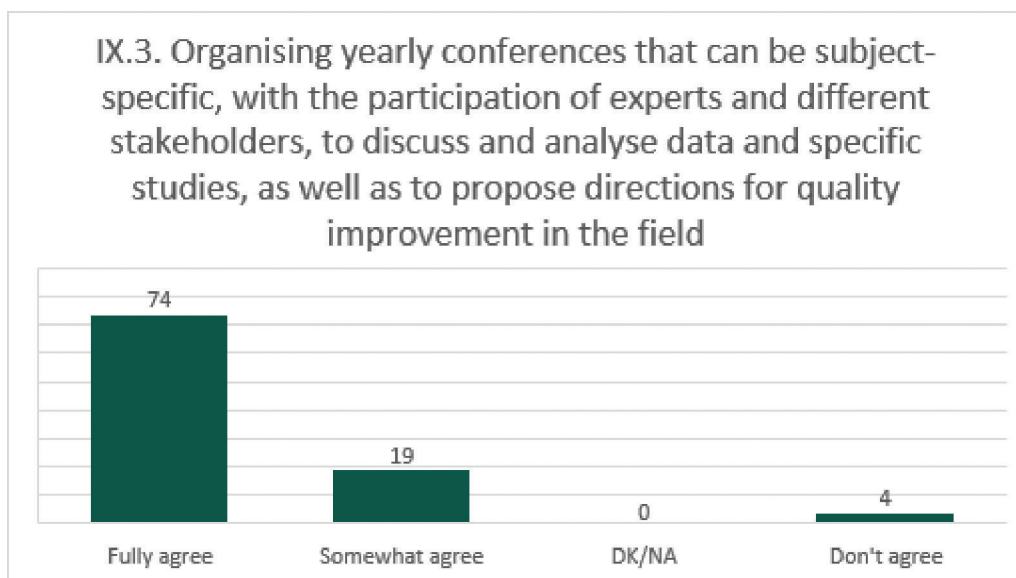
IX.1. Developing a communication strategy with stakeholders, to address the different categories, aiming to create a community of stakeholders interested in quality assurance in higher education, as well as to make largely known the current activities of ARACIS.



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/No answer	Disagree
79 (81.4%)	17 (17.6%)	-	1 (1%)

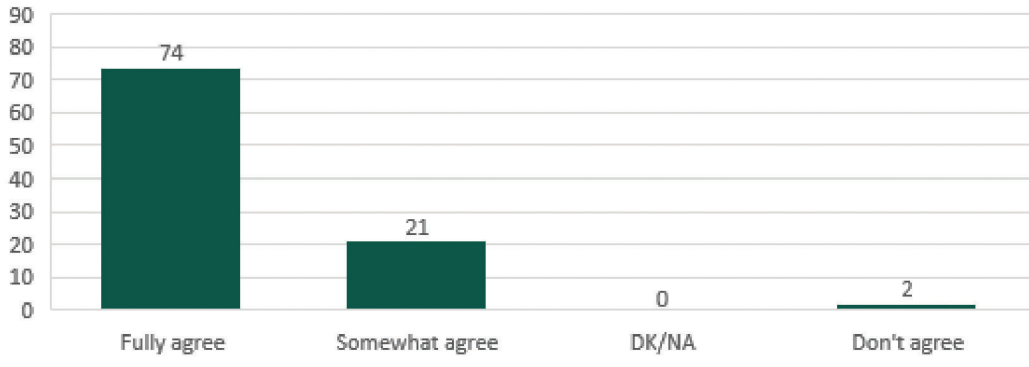


Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
81 (83.5%)	15 (15.5%)	-	1 (1%)



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
74 (76.3%)	19 (19.5%)	-	4 (4.2%)

**IX.4. For each study domain, organise a yearly conference/workshop, where representative of the permanent speciality commissions, academics and evaluators from the domain present syntheses/statistics/analyses regarding evaluation processes in the current year**



Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
74 (76.3%)	21 (21.6%)	-	2 (2.1%)

### OTHER PROPOSALS

From (respondents)	Proposal	Authors' Remarks
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Improve the channels of direct communication with each university, depending on the specificity of that university.	
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	I suggest direct communication with each university, depending on the specificity of that university.	
Employer	Extend this type of Survey to cover other areas of interest.	
Employer	Communities are consolidated around their interests, which, in the case of employers, are different from the universities' interests. Multiple factors determine the interests of a specific workforce type, and they are not the same; they are not constant.	

## 4. Discussion, Final Remarks and Conclusions

According to the data presented in paragraph 3.1, most responses came from universities: academics, non-academic staff, and students. This should not be surprising, considering that, according to ESG (2015), the responsibility of quality assurance is for the universities. The result indicates that in universities, there is an awareness of the need to involve other stakeholders in external quality assurance and, in addition, in their procedures of internal quality assurance. However, it may also indicate that other stakeholders, mainly external to higher education, are less aware of the direct and indirect benefits of their direct engagement in quality assurance activities.

### 4.1. General Remarks

**4.1.1.** For the proposals under points and sub-points (as applicable), I, II, III, IV, V.1, V.2, VI, VII.1, VII.2, IX, the minimum percentage of responses of *Fully agree* is 60.8. For all these points/sub-points, the high number/percentage of responses deemed as positive (*Fully agree* and *Somewhat agree*) **substantiate the inclusion of the proposed actions in the Action Plan.**

**4.1.2.** The percentage of *Do not agree* answers is below 5, except for sub-point *VII.1. The presence of employers' representatives should be extended to all Permanent Specialty Experts' Commissions*, where the percentage is 6.2. This result probably indicates that the respondents are aware of the difficulties of identifying representative employers and employers who would be available to be involved in activities outside their current professional tasks.

**4.1.3.** The Do not know/no answer percentage is between 0 (for five sub-points) and 4.2 - at *VIII.1. Setting an advisory council involving different stakeholders' representatives should be investigated, which is 4.2*. The results probably show that, in general, the respondents are interested in external quality evaluation, and they deem that they can provide pertinent answers for those questions in the Survey. The *VIII.1* correlate with the specific conclusions of this sub-point, further presented under C.2.

### 4.2. Specific Remarks

We provide details below on the results of the questions at which the percentages of *Fully agree* answers were below 70 and for which the difference is likely to be included in the percentages of *Somewhat agree* answers. The tables also mention the percentages of answers given by the various categories of respondents, based on the total number of similar answers. For instance, for the answer *Fully agree* at question V.3, out of 59 responses received, 14 come from public universities, accounting for 23.7 % of all similar responses received; an equal percentage was obtained from the 14 answers received from private universities.

By cumulating the percentages for the *Fully agree* and *Somewhat agree* answers, it may be concluded that there are no significant differences between the categories of respondents that gave them. This observation is valid for all the four questions for which the answers are analyzed below:

**Proposal V.3.** *A core curriculum for training should be developed, eventually recognized as a postgraduate course so that certificates could be issued.*

Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
<b>59 (62.1%)</b> Public universities 14 <i>(23.7%)</i> Private universities 14 <i>(23.7%)</i> Students' associations and students 19 (3 associations and 16 students) <i>(32.2%)</i> Research institutes 1 <i>(1.7%)</i> Employers 10 <i>(17%)</i> Other 1 <i>(1.7%)</i>	<b>31 (32.6%)</b> Public universities 13 <i>(41.9%)</i> Private universities 6 <i>(19.3%)</i> Students' associations and students 5 <i>(16.1%)</i> Research institutes 2 <i>(6.5%)</i> Employers 3 <i>(9.7%)</i> Other 2 <i>(6.5%)</i>	<b>1 (1.1%)</b>	<b>4 (4.2%)</b>

Comparison of the percentages of *Fully agree* answers for **V.3** reveals a certain amount of reluctance concerning the proposal; however, due to the nature of the question, cumulating several ideas/action proposals, the reason for such reluctance was not identified.

**Proposal VI. 1.** *The Agency should pay more attention in the evaluation process to the involvement of stakeholders in the internal quality assurance procedures in higher education institutions.*

Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
<b>68 (70.1%)</b> Public universities 19 <i>(27.9%)</i> Private universities 16 <i>(23.5%)</i> Students' associations and students 18 (3 associations and 15 students) <i>(26.5%)</i>	<b>23 (23.6%)</b> Public universities 10 <i>(43.5%)</i> Private universities 3 <i>(13%)</i> Students' associations and students 6 (1 association and 5 students) <i>(26.1%)</i>	<b>2 (2.1%)</b>	<b>4 (4.2%)</b>

Research institutes 3 (4.4%) Employers 10 (14.7%) Other 2 (3%)	Research institutes 1 (4.4%) Employers 3 (13%)		
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Comparing the percentages of *Fully agree* answers for VI.1 shows that the proposal cannot be deemed rejected. However, it indicates that its implementation will have to be done very carefully, preferably in a bottom-up approach, involving departments and faculties.

**Proposal VII.1.** *The presence of employers' representatives should be extended to all Permanent Specialty Experts' Commissions.*

Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/ No answer	Disagree
<b>59 (60.8%)</b> Public universities 16 (27.1%) Private universities 11 (18.7%) Students' associations and students 15 (3 association and 12 students) (25.4%) Employers 13 (22%) Research institutes 2 (3.4%) Other 2 (3.4%)	<b>30 (30.9%)</b> Public universities 10 (33.4%) Private universities 9 (30%) Students' associations and students 7 (1 association and 6 students) (23.3%) Research institutes 2 (6.7%) Employers 1 (3.3%) Other 1 (3.3%)	<b>2 (2.1%)</b>	<b>6 (6.2%)</b>

Comparison of the percentages of *Fully agree* answers mentioned for VII. 3 shows that this proposal scored the minimal percentage, which indicates that the respondents are probably aware of the difficulties related to the actual implementation.

**Proposal VIII.1.** *Setting an advisory council involving different stakeholders' representatives should be investigated.*

Fully agree	Somewhat agree	Do not know/No answer	Disagree
<p><b>64 (66%)</b> Public universities 18 (28.1%) Private universities 16 (25%) Students' associations and students 17 (3 association and 14 students) (26.5%) Research institutes 3 (4.7%) Employers 9 (14.1%) Other 1 (1.6%)</p>	<p><b>25 (25.6%)</b> Public universities 9 (36%) Private universities 3 (12%) Students 7 (28%)  Research institutes 1 (4%) Employers 4 (16%) Other 1 (4%)</p>	<p><b>4 (4.2%)</b></p>	<p><b>4 (4.2%)</b></p>

We deem that, in this case, the respondents were somewhat reluctant to create an additional advisory body, the role and set of competencies of which should be clearly defined.

#### 4.3. Additional Remarks and Proposals of the Respondents.

Other proposals or remarks concerning this topic	
From (respondents)	Proposal
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Support in the accreditation process of private universities - permanent consultant from ARACIS for each university.
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	What you want will be very difficult to implement in terms of an extended involvement of stakeholders. A close connection should first be achieved between the needs of the labour market and the higher education provision!
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Avoid excessive bureaucratization that would hinder the education process.
Employer	Set up permanent working groups, per specialities and topics of interest.

Employer	<p>Regarding strengthening the ARACIS structure, the position of Employers, expressed through their representatives, should be taken into account as well; furthermore, the assigning / certification of the employer’s representatives, members in the Consultative Commission, ARACIS Working Group as experts on ARACIS matters. The motivation resides in the fact that the purpose of Higher Education Institutions as Trainers is to create, train, and shape in a specific manner the abilities and the level of professional knowledge that will allow students - future graduates - not only the possibility to get employment but also the possibility to integrate in an efficient, targeted manner in the current activities of the employer, based on a continuous adjustment of the curricula to the needs of the Employers, highlighted by the institutional development policy and strategy.</p> <p>Periodical analysis of the activities and the results (including monitoring + multi-directional feedback + measures/correction/adjustment plan, according to the updated needs).</p>
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<b>Other general proposals or observations/comments on the participation of stakeholders in quality assurance in higher education</b>	
<b>From (respondents)</b>	<b>Proposal</b>
Member, ARACIS National Register of Evaluators	Stakeholders should just be consulted in order to find out what their needs are. Involving them should stop because the universities and ARACIS are professionals by excellence, and they take their mission seriously and create good study programmes and quality standards. So what could the “stakeholders” say?
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	We propose that stakeholders should be defined clearly, and it should be possible to select the stakeholders also based on the confessional specificity of the universities.
Personnel in a Higher Education Institution	Determine and communicate, in a standardized format imposed by the commission and in due time, all the problems that need to be solved by the institution undergoing the verification before the on-site visit.  Digitalise the evaluation processes within ARACIS in order to facilitate communication with the evaluated institutions (in the form of a dedicated platform).

Student	<p>The quality of higher education cannot be ensured if this education system is not connected to the reality around (labour market, the characteristics and problems of the current society, the psychological traits and needs of the current student and future professional adult). For instance, I think that perfecting a form of professional mentoring system (with students having as mentors not only professors or other students from the higher study years, but also professionals in the field) in the higher education institutions would be very helpful for the current situation.</p> <p>Furthermore, I believe that the strategies for improving the quality of higher education should be developed while looking at the problems of the pre-university system; the communication between the higher education and the pre-university education systems is essential.</p>
Employer	<p>Regarding strengthening the ARACIS structure, the position of Employers, expressed through their representatives, should be taken into account as well; furthermore, the assigning / certification of the employer's representatives, members in the Consultative Commission, ARACIS Working Group as experts on ARACIS matters. The motivation resides in the fact that the purpose of Higher Education Institutions as Trainers is to create, train, and shape in a specific manner the abilities and the level of professional knowledge that will allow students - future graduates - not only the possibility to get employment but also the possibility to integrate in an efficient, targeted manner in the current activities of the employer, based on a continuous adjustment of the curricula to the needs of the Employers, highlighted by the institutional development policy and strategy.</p> <p>Periodical analysis of the activities and the results (including monitoring + multi-directional feedback + measures/correction/adjustment plan, according to the updated needs).</p>

#### 4.4. Final Conclusions

The results of this analysis are additional solid proof of the value of the ESQA project. The answers received from most academic stakeholders lead to the conclusion that they are interested in learning, accepting and welcoming participation at external quality assurance processes of representatives of more comprehensive categories of non-academic stakeholders. Also, the stakeholders are expecting benefits from this kind of sometimes new experience for the internal quality assurance they should implement at their own HE institutions. The answers to *Proposal VI. 1. The Agency should pay more attention in the evaluation process to the involvement of stakeholders in the internal quality assurance procedures in higher education institutions* seems to be relevant proof in that sense.

At the same time, despite the smaller number of stakeholder respondents from outside the academic community, one can notice a certain lack of information on their expected role, although most of them express their willingness to become involved — moreover, the *Proposal V.3. A core curriculum for training should be developed, eventually recognized as a postgraduate course so that certificates could be issued* was primarily welcomed by representatives of HEIs, although the need for training is evident.

The need for action plans of agencies to take concrete steps in engaging stakeholders was a remarkable conclusion of the ESQA project, and it is supported in the case of ARACIS by the answers to this targeted questionnaire. One of the further proposals coming from an employer shows his/her view on how the involvement of stakeholders should contribute to increasing the quality and relevance of ARACIS activity: “About the strengthening of the ARACIS structure, the position of Employers, expressed through their representatives, should be taken into account as well”.

ARACIS has already taken a first step for implementing the action plan, creating a new position to be staffed with a dedicated person in charge of the relations with stakeholders, with the mission to coordinate the action of all other departments in that sense. The presentation of the action plan and the implementation measures shall be published in QAR in 2022.

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## Măsurarea performanței paginilor web ale universităților românești

*Virgil Stoica*

*Prof. univ. dr.  
Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”  
din Iași, România  
virgilstoica@gmail.com*

**Rezumat:** *Tehnologia informației și a comunicării este astăzi mai accesibilă, mai complexă și mai atractivă decât a fost vreodată. Iar acest fenomen este vizibil pe toate palierele societății, inclusiv în ceea ce privește învățământul superior. Paginile web ale universităților au devenit un element vital al învățământului superior; ele constituind principala interfață de comunicare între managementul universităților și toate părțile interesate. Plecând de la un model de dezvoltare treptată a guvernantei electronice, în care fiecare etapă reflectă un grad tot mai ridicat de sofisticare tehnică și de interacțiune cu utilizatorii, lucrarea prezintă construcția unui instrument de cercetare a calității paginilor web ale universităților din România, calitate observată din perspectiva utilizatorilor. Instrumentul acoperă cinci dimensiuni esențiale ale fenomenului: securitatea datelor personale, ușurința în utilizare, conținutul site-ului, serviciile oferite și participarea utilizatorilor. Sunt analizate apoi rezultatele unui studiu pilot de aplicare a acestui instrument pentru toate universitățile existente în România în momentul efectuării cercetării.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *guvernanță electronică, pagini web, performanță, universități*

**Abstract:** *Information and communication technology is today more accessible, more complex and more attractive than ever. And this phenomenon is visible at all levels of society, including higher education. University websites have become a vital element of higher education, being the main communication interface between university management and all stakeholders. Starting from a model of gradual development of e-governance, in which each stage reflects an increasing degree of technical sophistication and interaction with users, the paper presents the construction of a research instrument for the quality of web pages of Romanian universities, quality observed from user perspective. The tool covers five key dimensions of the phenomenon: personal data security, ease of use, site content, services provided and user participation. Then, we analyzed the results of a pilot study on the application of this instrument for all existing universities in Romania at the time of research.*

**Keywords:** *e-governance, webpages, performance, universities*

## Introducere

Atât literatura de specialitate cât și practicienii consideră că guvernarea electronică reprezintă o direcție importantă de dezvoltare a sistemelor politice și administrative în statele democratice.

Guvernarea electronică poate fi privită ca o nouă paradigmă în științele sociale, în administrația publică care se dezvoltă pe măsură ce tehnologiile evoluează (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, Thinkler, 2006, 241). Urmând succesul comerțului electronic de la sfârșitul anilor '90, guvernarea electronică a ajuns să reprezinte o direcție importantă a dezvoltării sistemelor politice și administrative din întreaga lume. Atunci când se studiază acest fenomen, prima provocare este de adaptare la o terminologie specială, care reflectă o nouă realitate. Este clar că fiecare autor aduce anumite contribuții la înțelegerea termenilor, dar este de remarcat că adăugarea termenului *electronic* modifică sensul conceptului tradițional (Fountain 2001, 13; Scholl 2008, 24). Astfel, *e-guvernare* nu este doar un cuvânt nou pentru definirea procesului de informatizare a sectorului public (Moon 2002, 430; Coleman 2008, 5).

În evoluția sa, e-guvernarea a beneficiat de șansa procesului inițiat la mijlocul anilor '90, de a „moderniza” administrația (Norris 1999, 73; Moon and Bretschneider 2002, 278). Guvernarea electronică a apărut pe agenda politică la sfârșitul anilor '90 și a fost considerată de mulți ca direcția cea mai importantă în dezvoltarea de administrației publice în secolul al XXI-lea (West 2005, 30). În plus, datorită creșterii explozive a afacerilor desfășurate *online*, au apărut opinii că e-guvernarea ar trebui să semene cât mai mult cu *businessul*, și să preia cât mai mult din experiența sa. Cu toate acestea, alte studii au arătat că e-guvernarea, fiind plasată în cadrul sferei publice, și nu în cadrul celei private, are propriile sale reguli, experiența proprie fiind mai importantă decât ceea ce s-ar putea învăța din alte domenii apropiate (Baacke 2008, 47; Carr 2007, 13).

Se presupune că guvernarea electronică ar crește eficacitatea administrativă și ar promova valorile democratice (Bernhard et al, 2018; Bannister and Connolly, 2014). Într-o eră digitală, cum este cea în care trăim, utilizarea tehnologiilor informaționale oferă posibilitatea îmbunătățirii calității serviciilor publice, iar implementarea cu succes a unor astfel de tehnologii a fost raportată în mai multe studii (Yun și Openheim 2010, 75; Gil-Garcia și Prado 2005, 210, etc).

Utilizarea tehnologiei informaționale, a guvernantei electronice, pentru a facilita interacțiunea studenților, dar și a altor utilizatori, cu universitățile a devenit o practică obișnuită datorită faptului că duce la reducerea barierelor legate de timp și spațiu (Henrie, Halverson, & Graham 2015, 48). Înțelegerea informațiilor care sunt necesare în interacțiunea cu diversele forme de public ale universităților poate ajuta la promovarea calității în învățământul superior (Leon, Neșțian, & Nica, 2015, 343). Informațiile digitale par să joace un rol central în performanța studenților și în gradul lor de satisfacție (Bawak & Kamdjoug 2020, 13). Aceasta se datorează faptului că noile generații de studenți au crescut utilizând internetul și calculatoarele și par a avea aptitudini naturale și abilități deosebite în utilizarea

noilor tehnologii informaționale (Jones, Ramanau, Cross, and Healing 2010, 723).

Dezvoltarea tehnologiilor comunicaționale bazate pe internet schimbă mediul academic peste tot în lume și forțează transformarea digitală a învățământului superior (Butt & Rehman, 2010, 5447). Există o așteptare din partea universităților să se preocupe de dezvoltarea și implementarea infrastructurii de comunicații digitale care să le asigure cele mai bune mijloace de comunicare cu toate părțile interesate. Aceste tehnologii digitale trebuie să ofere atât studenților cât și managementului universitar mijloace care să faciliteze interacțiunea, astfel încât misiunea instituțiilor de învățământ superior să fie atinsă mai ușor (Comi, Argentin, Gui, Origo, and Pagani 2017, 132). Există studii care arată că studenții utilizează dispozitivele electronice nu doar pentru a studia și a căuta informații, dar și pentru a accesa serviciile oferite de universitate (Viloria, Lezama, and Mercado-Caruzo 2020, 129).

Prin intermediul guvernantei electronice, în cazul universităților, se pot oferi informații actualizate către studenți, către vizitatori sau către mediul de afaceri, pot fi oferite o serie de servicii online, iar programul de lucru al administrației poate fi prelungit dincolo de programul „normal” cu publicul. Guvernanța electronică poate avea ca scop îmbunătățirea transparenței, responsabilității organelor de conducere alese, precum și creșterea participării studenților în procesul educațional și administrativ, ceea ce poate conduce la creșterea încrederii și la sporirea satisfacției utilizatorilor (Kim, Halligan, Cho, Oh, and Eikenberry 2005, 652).

În ciuda importanței sale, modul în care guvernanța electronică a fost implementată în universități nu a beneficiat de multe studii empirice (Pinho, Franco, and Mendes 2018, 89).

Această cercetare examinează site-urile oficiale ale universităților din România, pornind de la un model de dezvoltare treptată. Mulți autori sunt de acord că e-guvernarea s-a dezvoltat în mai multe etape, fiecare dintre ele reflectând un grad de sofisticare tehnică și de interacțiune sporită cu utilizatorii: difuzarea de informații (comunicare unidirecțională), comunicarea bidirecțională, serviciile online și tranzacțiile financiare, integrarea (orizontală și verticală), și participarea (Bhatnagar 2004,20; Layene 2001, 128). Pornind de la acest model, cercetarea evaluează nivelul de dezvoltare al guvernantei electronice în universitățile din România la nivelul anului 2018.

## **Metoda de cercetare**

Principalul scop al acestei cercetări a fost acela de a evalua performanța paginilor oficiale ale universităților din România, adaptând un model de evaluare a site-urilor urbane descris de Mark Holzer și Seang-Tae Kim în studiul lor, *Digital Governance in Municipalities Worldwide* (2007, 19-25). Al doilea scop al lucrării este acela de a identifica factorii care pot explica performanța diferită a universităților.

La momentul cercetării, în România erau 89 de universități. Ulterior, numărul acestora a scăzut la 87. Criteriul utilizat pentru evaluarea paginilor web ale

universităților a avut cinci componente: *securitatea și protecția datelor personale, ușurința în utilizare, conținutul, furnizarea de servicii și participarea digitală*. Grila de evaluare utilizează 104 de itemi, cu ajutorul cărora se poate obține un scor brut maxim de 226, și un scor ponderat maxim de 100. Ponderarea a fost necesară, deoarece fiecare dintre cele cinci dimensiuni are un număr diferit de întrebări (20 pentru securitatea datelor personale, 17 pentru ușurința în utilizare, 27 pentru conținut și câte 20 pentru serviciile oferite și pentru participare), precum și scoruri neponderate diferite (31, 29, 51, 60, 55). Celor cinci dimensiuni li s-au dat o greutate egală, neținând cont de numărul de întrebări utilizate pentru evaluare. Astfel, după ponderare, fiecare dimensiune a primit scoruri de la 0 la 20, punctajul maxim fiind 100.

Pentru *securitate și protecția datelor personale*, au fost operaționalizate concepte precum declarații publice privind protecția datelor personale, autentificare, criptare, managementul informațiilor colectate și utilizarea de *cookies*-uri. Ușurința în înțelegerea paginii de web și designul simplu, lungimea paginii de acces, structura acesteia, măsura în care se adresează unor audiențe specifice și capacitatea de a căuta informații pe site, au fost conceptele operaționalizate pentru dimensiunea *ușurinței în utilizare*. În ceea ce privește *conținutul*, accentul a fost plasat pe accesul la informații recente, la documente oficiale (carta universității, regulamente, procese verbale ale senatului, hotărâri ale conducerii universității), rapoarte, publicații, materiale audio-video, informații în mai multe limbi.

**Tabelul nr. 1** Componentele indicelui de performanță a guvernării electronice

Dimensiunea	Numărul de întrebări	Scorul maxim neponderat	Scorul maxim ponderat
Securitatea și protejarea datelor personale	20	31	20
Ușurința în utilizare	17	29	20
Conținutul	27	51	20
Serviciile oferite	20	60	20
Participarea	20	55	20
Total	104	226	100

În categoria *serviciilor furnizate* au fost incluse tranzacțiile între universitate și studenți (achitarea taxelor de școlarizare, a taxelor de cămin) sau între universitate și alte grupuri interesate (achiziții), reclamații, accesarea datelor personale. În ceea ce privește dimensiunea *participării*, operaționalizarea a privit mijloacele oferite

de pagina web a universității utilizatorilor pentru a furniza feed-back conducerii universității, dezbaterile online privind politicile universității, existența unui sistem de măsurare a satisfacției studenților.

Grila de evaluare a inclus exemple pentru fiecare item, operatorii primind explicații detaliate despre sistemul de notare. Pentru a asigura fidelitatea instrumentului, fiecare site a fost evaluat cel puțin două ori, de operatori diferiți. În cazul în care diferența dintre scorurile obținute a fost mai mare decât 5 puncte (5% din valoarea maximă a scalei), site-ul a fost evaluat încă o dată. Grila de evaluare a fost aplicată tuturor universităților din România care în timpul perioadei de cercetare (și anume în primele două decade din iunie 2018), au avut o pagină de web funcțională. Procesul de culegere a informațiilor a fost realizat cu ajutorul studenților din cadrul Departamentului de Științe Politice a Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași.

**Tabelul nr. 2** *Concepte operaționalizate pentru fiecare dimensiune*

Dimensiunea	Concepte
Securitatea și protejarea datelor personale	declarațiile publice în privința protejării datelor personale, managementul datelor obținute de la utilizatori, utilizarea cookies-urilor
Ușurința în utilizare	designul ușor de înțeles și de folosit, lungimea paginii de acces, structura, adresarea către anumite forme de public țintă, capacitățile de căutare a informațiilor pe site
Conținutul	accesul la informații recente, la documente oficiale (carta universității, regulamente, procese verbale ale senatului, hotărâri ale conducerii universității), rapoarte, publicații, materiale audio-video, informații în mai multe limbi
Serviciile oferite	tranzacțiile între universitate și studenți (achitarea taxelor de școlarizare, a taxelor de cămin) sau între universitate și alte grupuri interesate (achiziții), reclamații, accesarea datelor personale
Participarea	feed-back-ul oferit conducerii universității, dezbaterile online privind politicile universității, existența unui sistem de măsurare a satisfacției studenților

Datele culese au fost analizate statistic plecând de la patru dimensiuni care ar putea influența performanța guvernării electronice: tipul de proprietate, performanța academică dată de clasificarea Ministerului Educației, domeniul de activitate și mărimea.

Inițial, am presupus că universitățile particulare, nebeneficiind de locuri bugetate, ar trebui să fie mult mai active pe piață în atragerea studenților decât cele de stat.

Paginile lor web ar trebui să fie mai atente cu utilizatorii și nevoile acestora, să fie mai atractive, să ofere mai multe informații, să ofere mai multe posibilități de feedback. Astfel, prima ipoteză de lucru a fost:

H1: Scorul universităților particulare este mai ridicat decât al celor de stat.

În conformitate cu Legea Educației Naționale nr. 1/2011, în funcție de performanța lor academică, universitățile din România sunt clasificate în universități de cercetare avansată și educație, universități de educație și cercetare științifică și universități centrate pe educație. Am presupus că această performanță se va reflecta și în calitatea paginilor web ale acestora. A doua ipoteză de lucru a fost:

H2: Scorul universităților de cercetare avansată și educație este mai mare decât cel al universităților de educație și cercetare științifică și mai mare decât al celor centrate pe educație.

După domeniul de studiu, instituțiile de învățământ superior pot fi clasificate în universități agricole, universități de artă/sport, universități generaliste, universități de medicină, universități militare și universități tehnice. Am presupus că nivelul de competență tehnică necesară pentru crearea și utilizarea optimă a unei pagini web este diferit în funcție de domeniu, cu un posibil plus pentru universitățile tehnice. A treia ipoteză de lucru a fost:

H3: Domeniul de studiu al universităților contează în privința performanței guvernării electronice. Universitățile tehnice au scoruri mai ridicate decât celelalte categorii.

Cercetări efectuate cu un instrument similar în privința paginilor web ale orașelor (Stoica and Ilaș 2009, 180; Stoica and Ilaș 2013, 345) au arătat că o comunitate mai mare are resurse mai multe și deci o performanță mai bună în privința guvernării electronice. Universitățile mai mari, cu mai mulți studenți, dispun de mai multe fonduri, deci au capacitatea de a atrage mai ușor informaticieni buni sau de a cumpăra de pe piață serviciile necesare creării și administrării unei pagini web de calitate. A patra ipoteză de lucru a fost:

H4: Cu cât o universitate este mai mare, cu cât are mai mulți studenți, cu atât scorul ei în privința performanței paginii web este mai ridicat.

## **Prezentarea datelor și analiza lor**

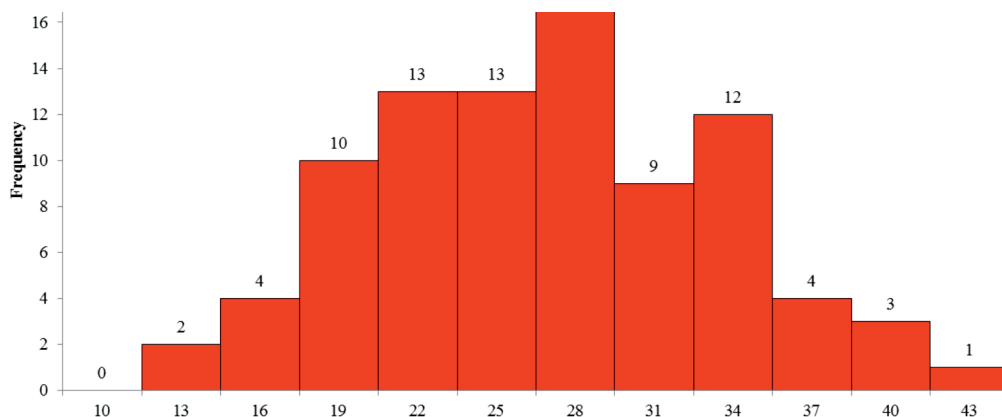
În momentul cercetării, 89 de universități erau acreditate. Toate aveau pagină web funcțională, pagini care a fost evaluate în conformitate cu metodologia prezentată mai sus. În Tabelul 3 sunt prezentate scorul mediu global și scorurile medii pe cele cinci dimensiuni ale măsurătorii. De asemenea, sunt prezentate deviația standard pentru întreaga populație de universități (ca măsură a dispersiei datelor în jurul mediei) și mediana (care împarte în două părți egale șirul ordonat al datelor)

Se poate observa că deși scorul maxim posibil este 100, cel mai bun scor obținut de o universitate din România este la mai puțin de jumătate (42,57) iar scorul mediu este la un sfert (25,52).

**Tabelul nr. 3** Scorurile maxime, minime și medii ale universităților din România

Dimensiunea	Scorul mediu	Scorul maxim	Scorul minim	Dev. stand.	Mediana
Scorul global	25,52	42,57	10,86	6,48	25,69
Securitate	0,89	7,1	0	1,46	0
Utilizare	12,31	17,93	4,83	1,46	11,72
Conținut	7,27	12,33	2,67	2,52	7,33
Servicii	3,34	8,51	0	1,81	2,98
Participare	1,70	4,73	0	1,27	1,45

Dintre cele cinci dimensiuni ale indicelui de evaluare, doar ușurința în utilizare atinge un nivel oarecum rezonabil (12,31 din 20 de puncte posibile). Conținutul informațional al site-urilor nu este foarte bogat (7,27 puncte), serviciile oferite online sunt puține (3,34 puncte), interacțiunile cu utilizatorii sunt limitate (1,7 puncte) și pare să nu existe aproape nici o preocupare pentru prezentarea informațiilor legate de securitatea și protejarea datelor personale (0,89 puncte din 20 posibile).

**Figura nr. 1** Histograma distribuției scorurilor paginilor web ale universităților din România

Faptul că mediana (25,69) este foarte apropiată de medie (25,52), arată că avem de a face cu o distribuție normală, cvasisimetrică, după cum se poate observa și din histograma scorurilor din Figura 1. Intervalul în care se situează grupul cu cele mai multe universități este 25 – 28, o singură universitate obținând un scor mai mare de 40.

În tabelul nr. 4 sunt prezentate scorurile generale și pe dimensiuni ale primelor universități în ordinea clasării. Se poate observa cu ușurință că patru dintre primele

șapte clasate sunt universități de medicină și farmacie, că dintre universitățile foarte mari ale țării doar Babeș-Bolyai se află în top și că nici o universitate privată nu se află în prima parte a clasamentului. Acest fapt a pus sub semnul întrebării ipotezele legate de influența unor factori precum tipul de proprietate al universităților, clasificarea acestora, domeniul lor și mărimea asupra performanței în ceea ce privește guvernarea electronică.

**Tabelul nr. 4** Scorurile globale și pe cele cinci dimensiuni ale câtorva universități

Universitatea	Scorul	Securit.	Utiliz.	Conț.	Serv.	Part.
Universitatea de medicină și farmacie din Târgu Mureș	42.57	3.87	13.79	11.67	8.51	4.73
Universitatea din Oradea	39.81	7.10	14.48	9.00	5.96	3.27
Universitatea de medicină și farmacie „Victor Babeș” din Timișoara	38.04	3.23	15.86	11.00	4.68	3.27
Universitatea de medicină și farmacie „Gr. T. Popa” din Iași	37.87	0.00	16.55	12.33	6.81	2.18
Universitatea din Craiova	36.57	0.00	14.48	10.67	8.51	2.91
Universitatea de medicină și farmacie „Iuliu Hațieganu” din Cluj Napoca	35.28	0.00	16.55	11.33	3.40	4.00
Universitatea „Babeș-Bolyai” din Cluj-Napoca	35.05	0.65	15.17	10.00	5.96	3.27
...						
Universitatea Ecologică din București	10.86	0.00	4.83	3.67	1.28	1.09

După tipul de proprietate, universitățile din România pot fi de stat sau articulare. Prima ipoteză de lucru formulată inițial a fost că scorul global al universităților particulare este superior celor de stat. Media scorului pentru cele 55 de universități publice a fost de 27,42, iar pentru cele 34 de universități private de 22,44. Pentru a testa această ipoteză am folosit ANOVA pentru un singur factor, pentru un nivel de semnificație de 0,05. Ipoteza de lucru a fost respinsă, valoarea  $p$  fiind practic nulă. Deci universitățile publice au un scor global semnificativ superior celor private. Tabelul rezumativ ANOVA, mediile și valoarea  $p$  obținută sunt prezentate în tabelul numărul 5.

**Tabelul nr. 5** Analiza varianței pentru tipul de proprietate al universităților

Anova pentru un singur factor						
Sumar						
Grupuri	Număr	Suma	Media	Varianța		
De stat	55	1508.55	27.42818	41.6159		
Particulare	34	763	22.44118	28.0929		
ANOVA						
Sursa varianței	SS	df	MS	F	Valoarea P	F crit
Între grupuri	522.5541	1	522.5541	14.32185	0.000282	3.950587
În interiorul grupului	3174.324	87	36.48649			
Total	3696.878	88				

A doua ipoteză de lucru afirmă că scorul universităților de cercetare avansată și educație este superior celor de educație și cercetare științifică și precum și celor centrate pe educație. După cum se poate observa din tabelul nr. 6, valorile scorurilor globale pentru cele trei tipuri de instituții sunt de 30,26 pentru primul grup, 27,74 pentru al doilea și 23,18 pentru al treilea.

**Tabelul nr. 6** Analiza varianței pentru universități de cercetare avansată și educație, universități de educație și cercetare științifică și universități centrate pe educație

Anova pentru un singur factor						
Sumar						
Grupuri	Număr	Suma	Media	Varianța		
CAE	12	363.15	30.2625	31.86938		
ECS	27	749.01	27.74111	38.97041		
CE	50	1159.39	23.1878	33.83738		
ANOVA						
Sursa varianței	SS	df	MS	F	Valoare P	F crit
Între grupuri	675.0527	2	337.5264	9.605871	0.000172	3.102552
În interiorul grupului	3021.826	86	35.13751			
Total	3696.878	88				

Folosind ANOVA pentru un singur factor, pentru un nivel de semnificație de 0,05, ipoteza de lucru a fost confirmată, valoarea p fiind mult mai mică decât 0,05 (Tabelul nr. 6). Aceasta înseamnă că, per ansamblu, între aceste trei grupuri există diferențe semnificative de performanță. Dar între care dintre aceste tipuri de universități există diferențe semnificative? Pentru a afla acest lucru a aplicat testul Tukey-Kramer care constă în comparații succesive între grupuri. După cum se poate observa din Tabelul nr. 7, la un grad de semnificație de 0,05, există diferențe semnificative din punct de vedere statistic doar între universitățile de cercetare avansată și educație, și universitățile de educație și cercetare științifică, pe de o parte, și universitățile centrate pe educație pe de cealaltă parte. Diferențele dintre scorurile globale al site-urilor web a primelor două categorii nu sunt semnificative din punct de vedere statistic. Astfel, a doua ipoteză de lucru a fost doar parțial confirmată.

**Tabelul nr. 7** Rezultatele testului Tukey-Kramer pentru tipuri de universități după clasificarea Ministerului Educației

Testul Tukey Kramer folosind comparații multiple							
	Eșantion	Eșantion		Diferența	Eroarea standard	Intervalul	
Grup	Medie	Mărime	Comparație	absolută	pentru diferență	critic	Rezultate
1 CAE	30.2625	12	Grupul 1 față de Grupul 2	2.52139	1.4542206	4.886	Mediile nu sunt diferite
2 ECS	27.74111	27	Grupul 1 față de Grupul 3	7.0747	1.3473819	4.527	<b>Mediile sunt diferite</b>
3 CE	23.1878	50	Grupul 2 față de Grupul 3	4.55331	1.0010343	3.363	<b>Mediile sunt diferite</b>
Alte date							
Nivelul de semnificație	0.05						
Numărător d.f.	3						
Numitor d.f.	86						
MSW	35.13751						
Valoarea Q	3.36						

După domeniul de studiu, am clasificat instituțiile de învățământ superior în universități agricole, universități de artă/sport, universități generaliste, universități de medicină, universități militare și universități tehnice. Ipoteza de lucru este că există o diferență semnificativă între aceste grupuri de universități, cele tehnice având o performanță superioară. Pentru testarea ipotezei am folosit tot ANOVA pentru un singur factor, pentru un nivel de semnificație de 0,05. Ipoteza de lucru a fost confirmată, valoarea  $p$  fiind de 0,000133 (Tabelul nr. 8). Din punct de vedere al scorului global mediu universitățile de medicină se află pe prima poziție (36,21), urmate de cele tehnice (29,02) și de cele militare (26,68)

**Tabelul nr. 8** Analiza varianței după domeniul universităților

Anova pentru un singur factor						
Grupuri	Număr	Suma	Media	Varianța		
Agricole	4	95.46	23.865	19.42537		
Arte	7	169.67	24.23857	42.11771		
Generale	56	1344.9	24.01607	37.91509		
Medicină	6	217.3	36.21667	18.19863		
Militare	7	183.51	26.21571	10.5537		
Tehnice	9	261.26	29.02889	23.23449		
ANOVA						
Sursa varianței	SS	df	MS	F	Valoarea P	F crit
Între grupuri	949.8147	5	189.9629	5.761704	0.00013	2.324473
În interiorul grupului	2736.504	83	32.96992			
Total	3686.318	88				

Pentru a afla între care dintre aceste grupuri există diferențe semnificative din punct de vedere statistic am aplicat testul Tukey-Kramer, la un nivel de semnificație de 0,05. După cum se poate observa din tabelul nr. 9, există diferențe semnificative statistic doar între universitățile de medicină și cele agricole, de arte și generaliste. Chiar dacă universitățile de medicină au un scor mediu mai bun decât cele tehnice și cele militare, diferențele nu sunt semnificative din punct de vedere statistic. Ipoteza a fost doar parțial confirmată.

**Tabelul nr. 9** Rezultatele testului Tukey-Kramer pentru tipuri de universități după domeniul lor

Testul Tukey Kramer folosind comparații multiple							
	Eșantion	Eșantion			Eroarea standard	Intervalul	
Grup	Medie	Mărime	Comparație	absolută	pentru diferență	critic	Rezultate
1 Agricole	23.8625	4	Group 1 to Group 2	0.37321	2.5601261	10.65	Mediile nu sunt diferite
2 Arte	24.23571	7	Group 1 to Group 3	0.11893	2.1139545	8.794	Mediile nu sunt diferite
3 Generale	23.98143	56	Group 1 to Group 4	12.3525	2.6365645	10.97	<b>Mediile sunt diferite</b>
4 Medicină	36.215	6	Group 1 to Group 5	2.82417	2.6365645	10.97	Mediile nu sunt diferite
5 Militare	26.68667	6	Group 1 to Group 6	5.16528	2.454508	10.21	Mediile nu sunt diferite
6 Tehnice	29.02778	9	Group 2 to Group 3	0.25429	1.6374621	6.812	Mediile nu sunt diferite
			Group 2 to Group 4	11.9793	2.2724328	9.453	<b>Mediile sunt diferite</b>
Other Data			Group 2 to Group 5	2.45095	2.2724328	9.453	Mediile nu sunt diferite
Level of significance	0.05		Group 2 to Group 6	4.79206	2.0584188	8.563	Mediile nu sunt diferite
Numerator d.f.	6		Group 3 to Group 4	12.2336	1.7545681	7.299	<b>Mediile sunt diferite</b>
Denominator d.f.	82		Group 3 to Group 5	2.70524	1.7545681	7.299	Mediile nu sunt diferite
MSW	33.36707		Group 3 to Group 6	5.04635	1.4668491	6.102	Mediile nu sunt diferite

Q Statistic	4.16		Group 4 to Group 5	9.52833	2.358215	9.81	Mediile nu sunt diferite
			Group 4 to Group 6	7.18722	2.1527459	8.955	Mediile nu sunt diferite
			Group 5 to Group 6	2.34111	2.1527459	8.955	Mediile nu sunt diferite

Ultima ipoteză de lucru este legată de mărimea universităților: cu cât o universitate este mai mare, cu atât scorul ei global în privința guvernării electronice va fi mai mare. Am clasificat universitățile după numărul de studenți în cinci categorii: foarte mici (sub 5000 de studenți), mici (5001 – 10000 studenți), medii (10001 – 15000 studenți), mari (15001 – 20000 studenți) și foarte mari (peste 20000 de studenți). Deoarece nu am găsit informații de încredere despre numărul de studenți ai universităților private, această ipoteză a fost testată doar pentru universitățile publice.

**Tabelul nr. 10** Analiza varianței după mărimea universităților

Anova pentru un singur factor						
Grupuri	Număr	Suma	Media	Varianța		
F mici	16	402.71	25.16938	25.97131		
Mici	14	404.36	28.88286	76.74301		
Medii	7	194.11	27.73	25.74		
Mari	6	146.63	24.43833	20.33382		
F mari	6	188.31	31.385	32.71891		
ANOVA						
Sursa varianței	SS	df	MS	F	Valoarea P	F crit
Între grupuri	258.2106	4	64.55266	1.5719	0.198579	2.583667
În interiorul grupului	1806.932	44	41.06665			
Total	2065.143	48				

Aplicând ANOVA pentru un singur factor, pentru un nivel de semnificație de 0,05, ipoteza de lucru a fost infirmată, valoarea p fiind 0,19, mult mai mare decât 0,05 (Tabelul nr. 10). Deci mărimea universității nu contează în performanța paginilor web.

## Concluzii

Acest studiu a propus un instrument de apreciere a site-urilor web ale universităților și a evaluat cu ajutorul său toate cele 89 de universități acreditate în momentul cercetării.

Toate cele 89 de universități din România aveau pagină web, însă scorul mediu al guvernantei electronice la nivelul universităților – 25,52 puncte din 100 posibile – este unul scăzut.

Dintre cele cinci dimensiuni ale indicelui de evaluare, doar ușurința în utilizare atinge un nivel oarecum rezonabil (12,31 puncte din 20 posibile). Conținutul informațional al site-urilor nu este foarte bogat (7,27 puncte din 20), serviciile oferite online sunt puține (3,34 puncte), iar interacțiunile cu utilizatorii sunt limitate (1,70 puncte). Din perspectiva utilizatorului nu exista aproape nici o preocupare pentru prezentarea informațiilor legate de securitatea și protejarea datelor personale (0,89 puncte).

Din cele patru ipoteze formulate înainte de cercetare, două au fost infirmate și două au fost confirmate parțial. Deși universitățile particulare ar trebui, teoretic cel puțin, să fie mai active în atragerea de studenți, iar paginile web constituie un element esențial în acest proces, performanța lor medie este inferioară celor de stat. O explicație posibilă este că multe dintre instituțiile private de învățământ superior se adresează unui public captiv, de nișă (legat de performanța școlară, de zona geografică, de limba utilizată în predare sau de confesiunea religioasă), fapt care nu le determină să performeze în atragerea de studenți prin mijloace de comunicare digitală. O cercetare calitativă ulterioară ar putea explica mai bine acest fenomen.

Universitățile de cercetare avansată și educație și cele de educație și cercetare științifică au performanțe mai bune decât universitățile centrate pe educație în privința calității paginilor web, dar între primele două categorii nu există deosebiri semnificative.

Universitățile de medicină au cele mai bune pagini web. Posibilitatea de a atrage studenți străini, care plătesc taxe de școlarizare semnificative și care au probabil și așteptări corespunzătoare din partea universităților la care studiază, le-au determinat pe acestea să gestioneze cu mai mare atenție acest sector al managementului universitar. Astfel, în cazul medicinei, concurența și piața par să funcționeze și să ofere un stimul superior universităților din alte domenii, care nu atrag un număr semnificativ de studenți străini.

Deși cercetări efectuate cu un instrument similar în privința paginilor web ale orașelor au arătat că o comunitate mai mare are resurse mai multe și deci poate performa mai bine în privința guvernării electronice, în cazul universităților, mărimea nu contează în privința calității paginilor web. O explicație a acestui fenomen necesită investigații suplimentare.

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