

## **Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education**

### **The Profile of the Romanian Student**

**Emilia Gogu, Mihaela Mureșan**

Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2018, pp. 14 – 25

**Publicat de:** Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior - ARACIS

**Locul publicării:** București, România

**Tipul publicației:** tipărit, online

**ISSN:** 2066 - 9119, 2069 - 2188 (online)

**Adresa:** Bd. Mărăști, nr. 59, Sector 1, București, cod poștal 011464

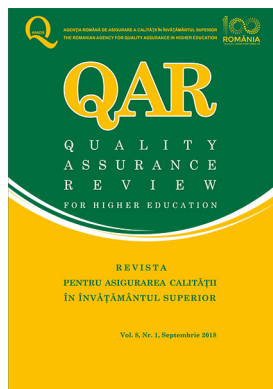
**Telefon:** +40 21 206 76 00; Fax: +40 21 312 71 35

**E-mail:** [qar@aracis.ro](mailto:qar@aracis.ro)

**Pagină electronică:** <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publicatii/qar-magazine/numarul-curent/>

Revista *Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education* este editată din fondurile proprii ale ARACIS și, în această etapă, contribuie și la sustenabilitatea proiectului „Dezvoltarea și consolidarea culturii calității la nivelul sistemului de învățământ superior românesc - QUALITAS”, Contract POSDRU/155/1.2/S/141894.

Toate drepturile rezervate. Pentru a reproduce un text din Revistă este necesar acordul scris al colegiului de redacție al Revistei pentru Asigurarea Calității în Învățământul Superior. Solicitarea poate fi trimisă Editorului, la adresa de poștă electronică: [office@aracis.ro](mailto:office@aracis.ro)  
Răspunderea pentru conținutul textelor publicate aparține autorilor.  
Conținutul acestui material nu reprezintă în mod obligatoriu poziția oficială a ARACIS.



## **Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education**

### **The Profile of the Romanian Student**

**Emilia Gogu, Mihaela Mureșan**

Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2018, pp. 14 – 25

**Published by:** The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ARACIS

**Place of publication:** Bucharest, Romania

**Publication type:** printed, online

**ISSN:** 2066 - 9119, 2069 - 2188 (online)

**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](mailto:qar@aracis.ro)

**Web page:** <http://www.aracis.ro/en/publications/qar-magazine/current-issue/>

*Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education* is edited from ARACIS own funds and, at this stage, also contributes to the sustainability of the project “The development and the consolidation of quality culture at Romanian higher education system – QUALITAS”, POSDRU Agreement 155/1.2/S/141894.

All rights reserved. No part of this Review may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the Editor. The request may be sent to the Editor by e-mail, at: [office@aracis.ro](mailto:office@aracis.ro)

The responsibility for the content of their contributions belongs to the authors.

The content of this material does not necessarily represent the official position of ARACIS.

# The Profile of the Romanian Student

*Emilia Gogu*

*Assoc. Prof. Dr.*

*University of Economic Studies,  
Bucharest, Romania*

*e-mail arina\_emilia@yahoo.com,  
emilia.gogu@csie.ase.ro*

*Mihaela Mureşan*

*Prof. Dr.*

*“Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University,  
Bucharest, Romania*

*e-mail mihaela.muresan@yahoo.com*

**Abstract:** *The paper builds on the results of a comprehensive study carried out by The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. In this respect, the research has valorised the data collected within the framework of the survey, as well as statistical data, in order to provide an in-depth analysis regarding the graduates' competences and skills and their compatibility with the market needs. The sociological research has valorised the main actors' views concerning the capacity of the higher education system to develop appropriate competences and skills according to the requirements of the market. The innovative approach consists of melting together quantitative and qualitative aspects, i.e. results from statistical data analyses with conclusions derived from the survey, in order to illustrate the state-of-the-art of the Romanian higher education system concerning its capacity to meet the requirements of the market. The findings revealed some gaps between the higher education system and the market, as well as important bridges which consist in the capacity of the higher education system to identify and provide the adequate framework for the development of the employability skills.*

**Keywords:** *higher education, sociological research, graduates' professional profile*

## 1. Introduction

The research has been initiated within the framework of the changing global world with a significant impact on the society as a whole, and in particular on qualifications, practices and experiences. In this context, the study emphasizes the role of the higher education system (HES) as driver for supporting the adaptability to the technological and globalization challenges. However, whilst the enrolment in higher education has constantly increased, the graduates' employment rate has decreased. Consequently, the higher education institutions (HEI) should focus on the

employability, i.e. on those “skills and attributes that make an individual desirable to potential employers” (Pan Ying-Ju, Lee Lung-Sheng, 2011). In a wider perception, the employability represents “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke, M., Knight T. P., 2003). Thus, the graduates’ profile should be accordingly updated, and the “graduates’ hard skills need to be complemented by a good blend of employability skills” (Ang M., 2015), and a good practical experience.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and compare the ranking of a set of skills required for entry-level jobs, as appreciated by the professors and students on one side, and by the employers on the other side. Thus, the article has a limited area of analysis, being focused on the graduates’ profiles and their employability. The data analysed have been obtained within the framework of a significant Romanian project, i.e. “Development and Strengthening the Quality Culture in the Higher Education System”, project carried out by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The analysis has taken into consideration the items referring to the competences and skills acquired by the students for the development of their professional profile. In this respect, the investigation has been focused on the identification of the mix of competences required on the market and the weight between professional and transversal competences. Significant aspects have been revealed also as regards the employers, their needs and their availability to cooperate with the HES.

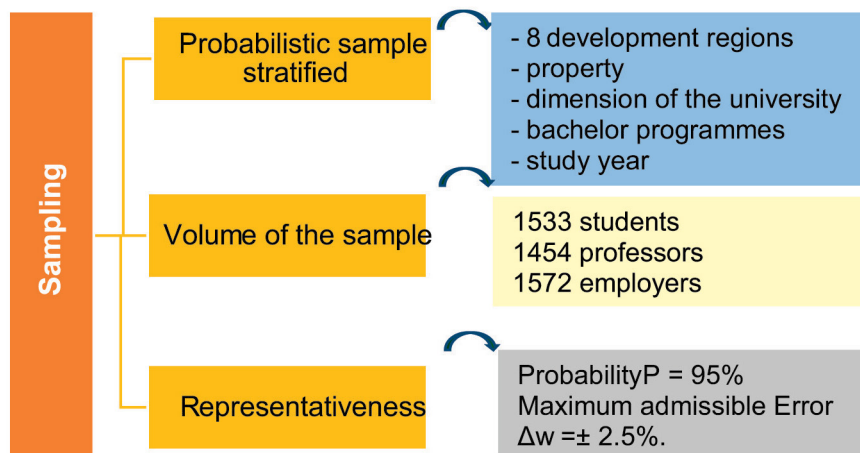
Analysing, on one side the employers’ perceptions, in terms of market needs, and on the other side the students’ perceptions about their professional career, as well as the professors’ views, significant matches and mismatches have been revealed. Thus, addressing the mismatches between academic and socio-economic context represents the main way of improving quality in the HES.

## **2. Methodological Approach**

As previously mentioned, the research builds on data provided by a comprehensive survey, which has been conducted between May and July 2015, on a representative sample. Data have been obtained, via three different sets of survey questionnaire, from the graduating students, professors and from the employers. The selected sample encompassed 1533 bachelor students, 1454 teaching staff in HEIs and 1572 employers, from all the regions of the country and all fundamental areas of bachelor studies. Besides the geographical representativeness, both state and private HEIs have been involved. The survey was aimed at gauging the respondents’ perceptions in relation to policies and quality of the Romanian higher education system (RHES). In this regard, the survey had a wide ambitus, based on multidimensional perceptions, leading to a Quality Barometer in RHES. The present analysis has extracted, compared and interpreted the data regarding the main social actors’ views

in relation to the graduates' profiles and their employability. An integrated view on the methodology regarding the survey is presented in the fig. 1.

**Figure 1: Sampling methodology**



As the research literature clearly shows, the cooperation between HEIs and the employers creates the best premises for ameliorating the discrepancies regarding the graduates' profile. Furthermore, this collaboration should be extended beyond the identification of individual employability skills, in order to develop common strategies for generating new knowledge according to actual challenges (Nixon, 2008). In this respect, the research has integrated the results of the survey and interviews involving both academic and business areas.

Moreover, the data provided by the survey have been articulated with the specific context of the higher education system, according to the statistical data and its actors' views. Consequently, the methodological approach combined both desk and empirical research, in order to refine the results and to provide an accurate image regarding the graduates' employability.

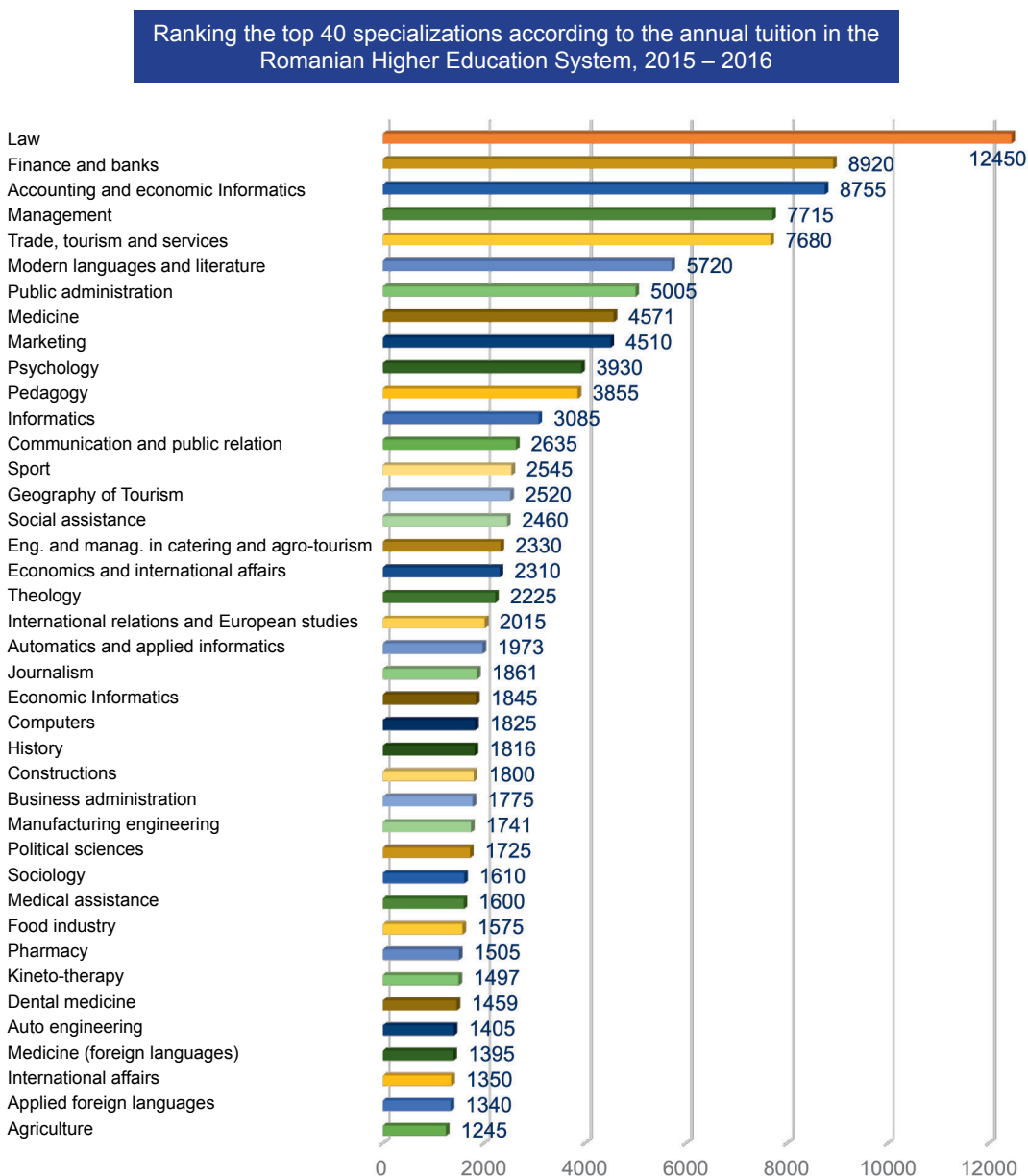
Additionally, the quantitative and empirical research has been complemented with a desk research, focused on reviewing the theoretical framework on employability skills.

### 3. Context of the Higher Education System

In the first phase of the research the state-of-the-art in the academic area has been analysed. The capacity of the RHES consists of 10 HEIs, out of which 56 are public HEIs and 47 private ones (INS, 2015). Within the HEIs there are 590 faculties, out of which 405 belong to the public HEIs. Another important indicator is represented by the educational offer structured on 6 fundamental domains, which encompass 32 branches of science, generating 86 bachelor domains, i.e. 379 specializations/

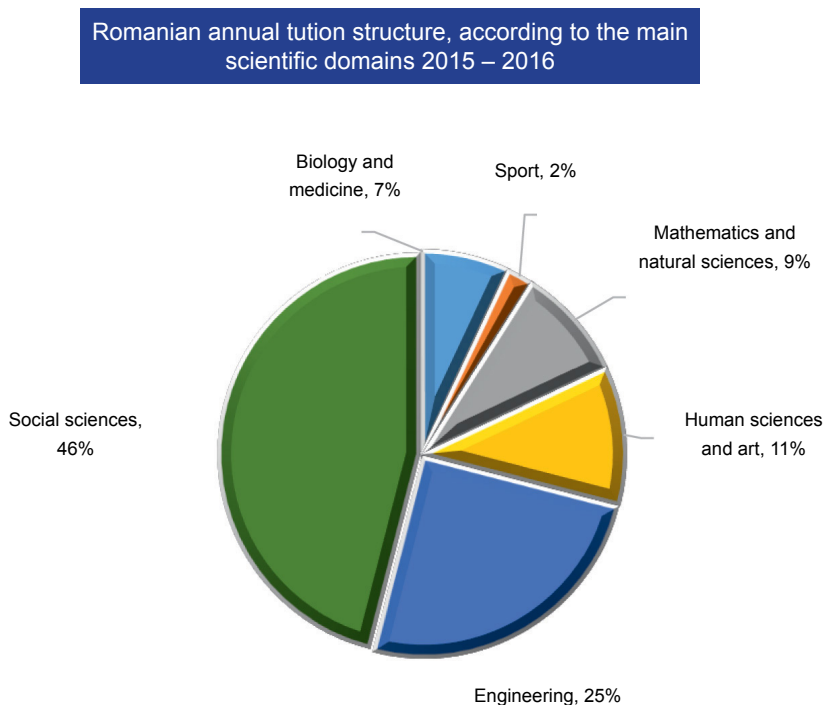
bachelor study programmes. Besides the macro perspective, tuition figures (maximum number of students who could be enrolled in the first year) have been also analysed, indicating whether or not the offer is articulated with the demand. Thus, the situation of the 2015-2016 does not show an appropriate correlation with the actual challenges and technological changes, since annual tuition for law specialization is the highest, being 10 times greater than the agriculture specialization, for instance. Moreover, the tuition fee for technical and various engineering specializations is quite low despite the actual technological changes, as it is illustrated in the figure 2.

**Figure 2: Annual tuition for each specialization**



The same tendency has been noticed regarding the main scientific domains, the annual tuition being weighted to the socio-human sciences, covering 57% (46% social sciences and 11% human sciences and art). The deficit in the engineering area is also obvious (25%), as it is revealed in the figure 3.

**Figure 3:** Annual tuition per scientific domain



The brief contextual analysis has revealed that the Romanian Higher Education System (RHES) does not provide an appropriate articulation with the market and shows a quite inertial behaviour, without sufficient permeability to the changing environment. Consequently, the simple quantitative analysis reveals that the RHES does not clearly demonstrate its capacity to provide the specializations required by the market. Besides the professional profiles, transversal skills also contribute to increase the graduates' employability. In this regard, the further analysis has been focused on the main actors' perceptions in relation to the professional and transversal skills, the ranking of skills and the extent to which these skills meet the employers' requirements.

#### 4. Overall view on the quality of the HEIs

The educational process represents the main instrument for preparing individuals to meet the global market requirements. In this perspective, the HEIs play a major part in improving graduates' employability with direct benefits for economic progress (Archer and Davison, 2008). Employability has been defined as a main

objective of the higher education since earliest studies (Robbins, 1963). However, despite the conceptual and pragmatic efforts, employability still remains a complex issue and a significant challenge for the HEIs (Rae, 2007).

Beyond the political and strategical concern, the survey illustrates a pragmatic approach, highlighting clearly the pressure put on HEIs, but also the increased social responsibility. Thus, the responsibility perceived by universities (represented by professors), students and employers regarding the acquisition of employability skills is well balanced, each actor assuming its role and being simultaneously aware of the other partners' role (see table 1).

**Table 1:** Comparative analysis regarding responsibilities for the acquisition of employability skills

Respondents	HEIs		Students		Employers	
	To a large extent (%)	To a very large extent (%)	To a large extent (%)	To a very large extent (%)	To a large extent (%)	To a very large extent (%)
Professors	51	39	44	45	50	30
Students	51	33	38	48	45	22
Employers	50	36	41	48	45	27

Source: Own data processing of the survey (<http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/>)

The pressure on HEIs is also illustrated by the respondents' answers, all actors considering that universities have the main responsibilities for the graduates' employability. Students, of course, should be aware of the importance of developing a competitive professional profile and in this respect it is a consensus among the respondents. Thus, all actors have outlined the students' responsibilities, scores being clearly weighted in this respect. Interesting is that besides the universities, the other actors do not consider that the employers' role is as important as the universities' and students' one. Moreover, the employers' answers demonstrate that they do not assume their role seriously in the development of the graduates' professional profile.

In this context, the overall perception of the quality of the educational process in HEIs is positive, from both students' and employers' perspectives. Thus, significant conclusions have been drawn through the correlation of the students' answers regarding the global evaluation of the educational process, as it is illustrated in the table 2.



**Table 2:** Students' global evaluation of the HEIs

Specific global items	Total
The university is reliable	8,30
The study programmes meet the market requirements	7,81
The management of the HEI is efficient	7,62
Specialisation has an important social dimension	8,16

Source: Own data processing of the survey (<http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/>)

The students' answers are overall coherent, a strong correlation being noticed among the respondents' perception. In this respect, if the HEI is considered reliable, also management is efficient ( $r = 0,771$ ) and the study programmes and their articulation with the market is also well appreciated ( $r = 0,778$ ).

The overall employers' views are also positive in relation to the mission of the HEIs; 55% of the subjects consider that the universities have succeeded to provide appropriate competences for their students. Furthermore, 72% of the employers involved in the survey appreciated positively the quality of the educational process (26% to a very large extent and 46% - to a large extent). However, the weight in favour of those who still believe that universities are diploma mills remains significant (52%, out of which 24% - to a very large extent and 28% - to a large extent).

## 5. Graduates' Professional Portrait

There are still large debates in the scientific literature concerning the employability skills (Sumanasiri et al, 2015) without finding a consensus. Difficulties in this area are generated not only by the complexity of the problem, but also by the stakeholders' approaches, which are sometimes totally different (Wickramasinghe V., Perera L., 2010). Opinions and perspectives related to employability and appropriate skills for increasing the employability chances range from articulated frameworks and models to simple and pragmatic approaches. Without the intention to offer a comprehensive inventory in the field, some of the existing models related to employability are listed, starting with the first study done by Hillage & Pollard (1998), which defined a framework for the employability, without the identification of the main interfering factors. The concept of "employability skills" structured as basic skills, higher order thinking skills, affective skills and traits has been introduced by Kethleen Cotton (1993). Despite the definition of employability framework and skills, employment issues have not been covered and other models have been developed, such as: USEM models (Understanding, Skills, Efficacy beliefs and Metacognition) a theoretical framework defined by Pool and Sewell, in

2007; Career EDGE model creating a practical framework; integrated competence model of employability (knowledge, skills and personal aptitudes) proposed by Wellman (2010); JET (Journey of Employment) proposed by Copps & Plimmer in 2013, revealing the non-linear approach of the employment process and the interfering of a large set of factors.

Due to the difficulties in finding an appropriate model for employability skills, the survey has used a set of transversal skills, taking into consideration both academic and business-oriented dimensions. Regarding the graduates' professional profile, the subjects agreed that besides the professional skills, adjacent competences are needed for being competitive. In this regard, the questionnaires have integrated a set of adjacent skills considered important for increasing the graduates' employability. Some of the main employability skills recognized in the literature have been included in the questionnaires, such as: positive attitude, self-management, team working, communication, application of information technology (Lowden K. et al., 2011). The ranking of the employability skills (scale 1 to 5, where 1 = not important and 5 = very important), according the stakeholders' opinions, have been synthesized in the table 3.

**Table 3:** Employability skills ranking (average level of importance)

Employability skills	Students	Professors	Employers
Capacity to argue convincingly on a specific topic	3.88	4.04	3.6
Ability to draw up a report concisely and specifically	3.88	3.94	3.53
Analytical thinking	4	4.13	4.37
Critical thinking	3.93	3.92	3.9
Creativity	3.82	3.93	3.81
Digital competence	3.84	4.1	3.87
Ability to speak and write in a foreign language	3.6	3.66	3.59
Team working skills	3.89	4.08	4.01
Leadership	3.77	3.68	3.42
Self-management skills	3.92	3.95	3.57
Positive attitude towards work	3.87	4.13	3.81
Entrepreneurial skills	3.63	3.53	3.1
Good knowledge of the specific employment domain			4.11
Communication skills			4.09
Punctuality			3.91
Pro-active attitude			3.94

**Source:** Own data processing of the survey (<http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/>)

The social actors' views are convergent in relation with the analytical thinking, which is considered as being particularly important. Students highlighted also critical thinking and self-organised skills as important for employability and professors appreciate a positive attitude towards work and digital skills as important employability assets. Employers also consider important a good knowledge of the specific employment domain and the communication skills. Moreover, a strong correlation between students' and professors' views has been noticed (0.84), as well as between professors' and employers' opinions (0.82, since the distance between students' and employers' views is a bit greater (0.75).

An interesting feedback has been obtained from the employers, analysing in parallel the ranking of the employability skills and their level of satisfaction in relation with the employees and their skills (scale 1 to 5, where 1=not important and 5=very important). The average scores, according to the employers' answers and the results of the statistical tests have been presented in the table 4.

**Table 4:** Ranking employability skills versus employers' level of satisfaction

Criteria	Average level of importance	Average level of satisfaction	Average difference	t	sig
Analytical thinking	4.37	4.02	0.35	11.31	.000
Good knowledge of the specific employment domain	4.11	3.85	0.26	7.51	.000
Communication skills	4.09	3.92	0.18	5.21	.000
Team working skills	4.01	3.87	0.14	4.12	.000
Pro-active attitude	3.94	3.56	0.38	10.67	.000
Punctuality	3.91	3.83	0.07	2.33	.020
Critical thinking	3.90	3.53	0.36	10.86	.000
Digital skills	3.87	4.13	-0.26	-8.50	.000
Creativity	3.81	3.80	0.01	0.20	.839
Positive attitude towards work	3.81	4.14	-0.33	-9.73	.000
Capacity to argue convincingly on a specific topic	3.60	3.87	-0.27	-8.51	.000
Ability to speak and write in a foreign language	3.59	4.31	-0.72	-22.12	.000
Self-management skills	3.57	3.56	0.01	0.30	.764
Ability to draw up a report concisely and specifically	3.53	3.88	-0.35	-10.13	.000
Leadership	3.42	3.64	-0.22	-5.38	.000

Source: Own data processing of the survey (<http://www.aracis.ro/proiecte/qualitas/>)

As the data clearly show, there is a perfect match between expectations and satisfaction concerning the employees' creativity and the self-organised capacity. In other cases, the employers are more satisfied than they have expected, for instance regarding digital skills and foreign language skills. As regards analytical and critical thinking, as well as knowledge of the specific employment domain, the average levels of employers satisfaction are lower than the expected ones.

## 6. Conclusions

The answers provided by teachers, students and socio-economic actors have outlined positive aspects, but also a number of weaknesses of RHES in structural terms and in relation with the educational performance of the HEIs. These signals could be further valorised for enhancing the quality in the higher education process.

The education system has grown and diversified in recent years, as confirmed by statistical data. However, the survey and the interviews with professors from HEIs revealed a gap between supply and actual market needs, in terms of specializations, and tuition figures. From this point of view, the data signals structural deficiencies and inconsistencies in internal communication of the RHES. A better correlation of the RHES offer with the actual market requirements represents a major issue that should be corrected, and in this respect strengthening the cooperation and developing a fluent communication between HEIs and the public entities responsible for the good functionality and quality of the RHES represents a priority.

The graduates' employability remains an open problem and further methodological refinements are needed, in terms of indicators, models and procedures to be applied for bridging the gap between academic and business areas. Anyway, evaluating the compatibility between HES and the socio-economic actors should represent a continuous and rigorous process, contributing to the amelioration of the quality in higher education at the systemic and institutional level.

## References

- Ang, Magdalene C. H. 2015. *Graduate employability awareness: a gendered perspective*. 2nd Global Conference on Business and Social Science-2015, GCBSS-2015, 17-18 September 2015. Bali, Indonesia.
- Copps, John, and Dawn Plimmer. 2013. *Inspiring impact - The journey to employment: A guide to understanding and measuring what matters for young people*. NPC.
- Cotton, Kathleen. 1933. *Developing Employability Skills*, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, U.S.A.

Fodor, Elena-Mihaela, Rodica Diana Apan, Corina Buzdugan, Emilia Gogu, Irina Zlatescu-Moroianu, Mariana Narcisa Radu, Mihnea-Dan Radu, Ludo Veny and Sorina Lucretia Dragan. 2015. *Educație și Drept – Interferențe / Education and Law – Interferences*. Bucharest: Pro Universitaria Publishing. ISBN 978-606-26-0489-9.

Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior, ed. 2015. *Policy Paper- Politici și strategii instituționale în învățământul superior*. Bucharest. POSDRU – QUALITAS, ARACIS. ISBN 978-973-0-20487-2.

[http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii\\_Aracis/Publicatii\\_ARACIS/Romana/2015/Policy\\_Paper\\_ro\\_online.pdf](http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/Publicatii_ARACIS/Romana/2015/Policy_Paper_ro_online.pdf).

HG 554 bis/2015 - *Nomenclatorul domeniilor și al specializărilor/ programelor de studii universitare*

INS, <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

Lowden, Kevin, Stuart Hall, Dely Elliot and Jon Lewin. 2011. *Employers' perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates*. London: Edge Foundation.

Nixon, Ian. 2008. *Work-based Learning: Impact Study*. York: Higher Education Academy.

Pan, Ying-Ju, and Lung-Sheng Lee. 2011. "Academic Performance and Perceived Employability of Graduate Students in Business and Management – An Analysis of Nationwide Graduate Destination Survey". *Elsevier Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 25: 91 – 103.

Petrescu, Iordan, and Emilia Gogu. 2017. *Oferta sistemului de învățământ superior românesc*. Bucharest: ARACIS. ISBN 978-973-0-24169-3.

Petrescu, Iordan, and Emilia Gogu, Iucu Bumbu R. (coordonatori). 2017. *Quality Barometer-2016*, The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, pag 366 ISBN 978-973-0-24193-8. [http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii\\_Aracis/2017/Quality\\_Barometer\\_2016\\_EN.rar](http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/2017/Quality_Barometer_2016_EN.rar).

Petrescu, Iordan, Oana Sârbu and Emilia Gogu. 2015. "Componentele de bază și instrumente de analiză și corelație a Sistemului Național de Învățământ Superior". *QAR - Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education – Revista pentru asigurarea calității în învățământul superior* 6 (1): 3-26. ISSN 2066-9119. [http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Revista\\_QAR/2015/QAR\\_1\\_2016\\_online.pdf](http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Revista_QAR/2015/QAR_1_2016_online.pdf).

Pool, Lorraine D., and Peter Sewell. 2007. "The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate employability". *Education + Training* 49 (4): 277 – 289. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00400910710754435>.

Sumanasiri, Erabaddage, Mohd Shukri Ab Yajid and Ali Khatibi. 2015. "Review of Literature on Graduate Employability". *Journal of Studies in Education* 5 (3): 75 -88.

Wickramasinghe, Vathsala, and Lasantha Perera. 2010. "Graduates', university lecturers' and employers' perceptions towards employability skills". *Education + Training* 52 (3): 226-244, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00400911011037355>.

Yorke, Mantz, and Peter Knight. 2006. *Embedding employability into the curriculum*. The Higher Education Academy, York, U.K.