



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



**CEENQA WORKSHOP AND  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

# **Stakeholders engagement in Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ARACIS view**

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# The purpose of the presentation:



**I. Current correlation of objectives of QA in HE and stakeholders' perceptions. If there is any?**



**II. ARACIS case study**



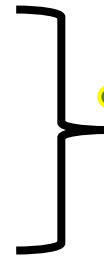
**III. QAA's benefits of working well with stakeholders**



## Two different concepts in the title:

**Quality Assurance in HE**

**Stakeholders in HE**



**Make them  
work together....**

**But:**

- Both have no precise definition
- Diversity in perception on QA among stakeholders
- The same label for different things
- Meaning of both concepts is different:
  - ✓ From country to country
  - ✓ From institution to institution
  - ✓ From individual to individual



## **A brief overview on different ways of how quality in higher education can be understood and defined**

### **What is Quality in Higher Education?**

**It is important to raise this question at the beginning of any discussion about quality or quality assurance in higher education.**

**At a first look, the answer might be that:**

- ✓ either we don't really know what quality is**
- ✓ or that it can be many different things.**

**Although there might be no single and universally accepted definition, several authors have attempted to explain and systematize the concept of quality in higher education.**

**Based on a review of various attempts at defining quality in higher education, Harvey and Green (1993) proposed five “ways of thinking about quality”, rather than definitions**



# What is (should be) the meaning (definition) of quality for higher education Five “ways” to think about quality

the focus is on the output per input ratio, with the aim of gaining more efficiency

Quality as value for money – cost effective

in this view quality is measured by the level of achievement of a stated purpose

Quality as fit for purpose – satisfying needs

this view refers to quality as excellence with regard to the highest academic standards

Quality as excellence – achieving the highest of standards

views quality as value-added and transformation of a student through the learning process (SC)

Quality as transformation – continuous improvement

this approach looks at quality as a process to eliminate defects

Quality as perfection – a consistent or flawless outcome with zero errors

Harvey and Green (1993) proposed five “ways of thinking about quality”, rather than definitions





## Other ways to think about higher education quality

Another way by which quality in higher education can be understood and has been discussed in the literature concerns two additional aspects, namely **the context** and **the stakeholders**

The first one links quality to **the context** and looks at specific elements of the process, such as quality of assessment, student intake, academic programs, teaching and learning or student experience

The second one examines the quality from the **stakeholders' perspective**.

It focuses on the premise that there is a diversity of perceptions regarding what quality of higher education is among different stakeholders such as policy makers, academics, students or employers.



# Who Are the Stakeholders in Quality Assurance?

## Stakeholder definition

Anyone who directly takes part in or has the ability to affect the performance of higher education institutions should be considered a stakeholder, and therefore relevant for and directly or indirectly involved in quality assurance.



# Stakeholders classification

## Different approaches:

### ✓ **Supply and demand division** (*Watty, 2003*)

1) Supply side of higher education: governments, quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and individual academics.

2) Demand side: students, employers, parents and society at large

### ✓ **Key categories in defining the quality** (*Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003*)

1) Providers (e.g., funding bodies and the community, taxpayers);

2) Users of products (e.g., students);

3) Users of outputs (e.g., employers);

4) Employees of the sector (e.g., academics and administrators)

### ✓ **Internal and external to agencies** (*Sencila, 2013*)





# Key groups of stakeholders in QA

Based on the different quality assurance approaches and different levels of engagement, several key groups of stakeholders in quality assurance can be identified

**Stakeholder  
identification**

**International QA bodies  
(ENQA, EQAR.....)**

**Government and  
authorities, (Ministry  
responsible for HE and  
research...)**

**External committees  
(National Council of Rectors,  
Qualification Agency....)**

**Students  
Alumni**

**QAA**

**HEIs**

**Academics**

**Employers or industry  
representatives**

**Society (Unions, professional  
bodies, media ....)**



## Different stakeholder - different perspective

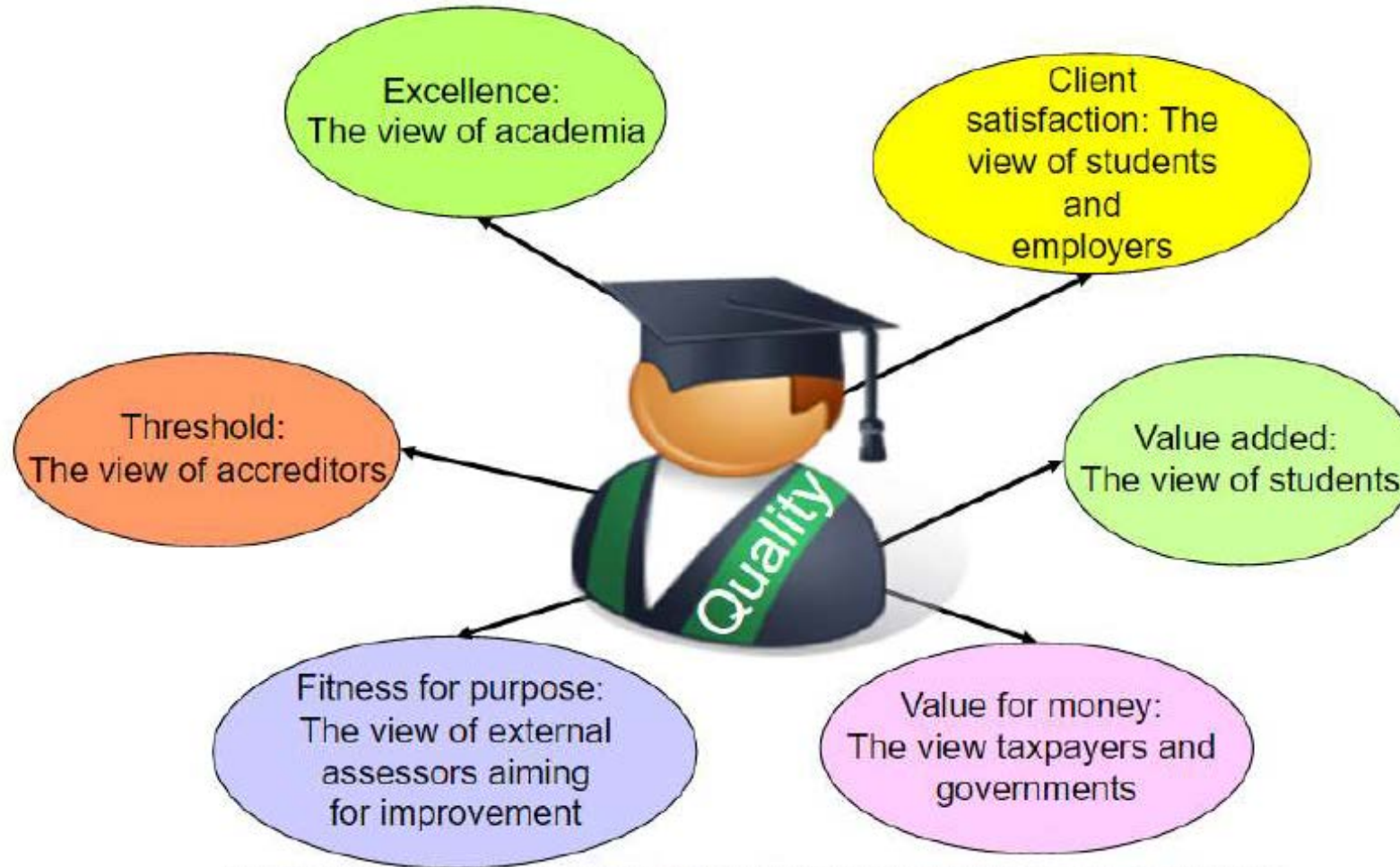
Each stakeholder group tends to have a different perspective and definition of quality:

**Students** may associate quality with the academic program in which they study, their learning or with the **overall student experience** and student support structures at their university

**Employers** tend to be more concerned with quality in terms of the final product, which may refer **to the qualifications the graduates possess**

**Academics** may be more concerned about **the academic standards of excellence** in their respective disciplines

# Combining perspectives and stakeholders views on quality



Concluding point:  
There is **no single way** to understand the concept of QA, and an efficient definition should be developed and made fit to the local context, traditions and aims of higher education



## Comments on differences in perceptions of quality in HE

This diversity in perceptions of quality among different stakeholders is an important aspect to consider when developing own definitions of quality in higher education.

“these differences in perceptions of quality by different stakeholders are at the root of misunderstandings and conflicts between the different actors of quality assurance systems” (2008 OECD report: “Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society, Volume 1” )

“the problem is not a different perspective on the same things but different perspectives on different things with the same label” (Harvey and Green, 1993).

### **Instead of conclusions:**

**The diversity of understanding of higher education quality, among relevant stakeholder groups, represents a considerable challenge for the development of a comprehensive and credible quality assurance system for higher education.**

## ARACIS case study on diversity in perceptions

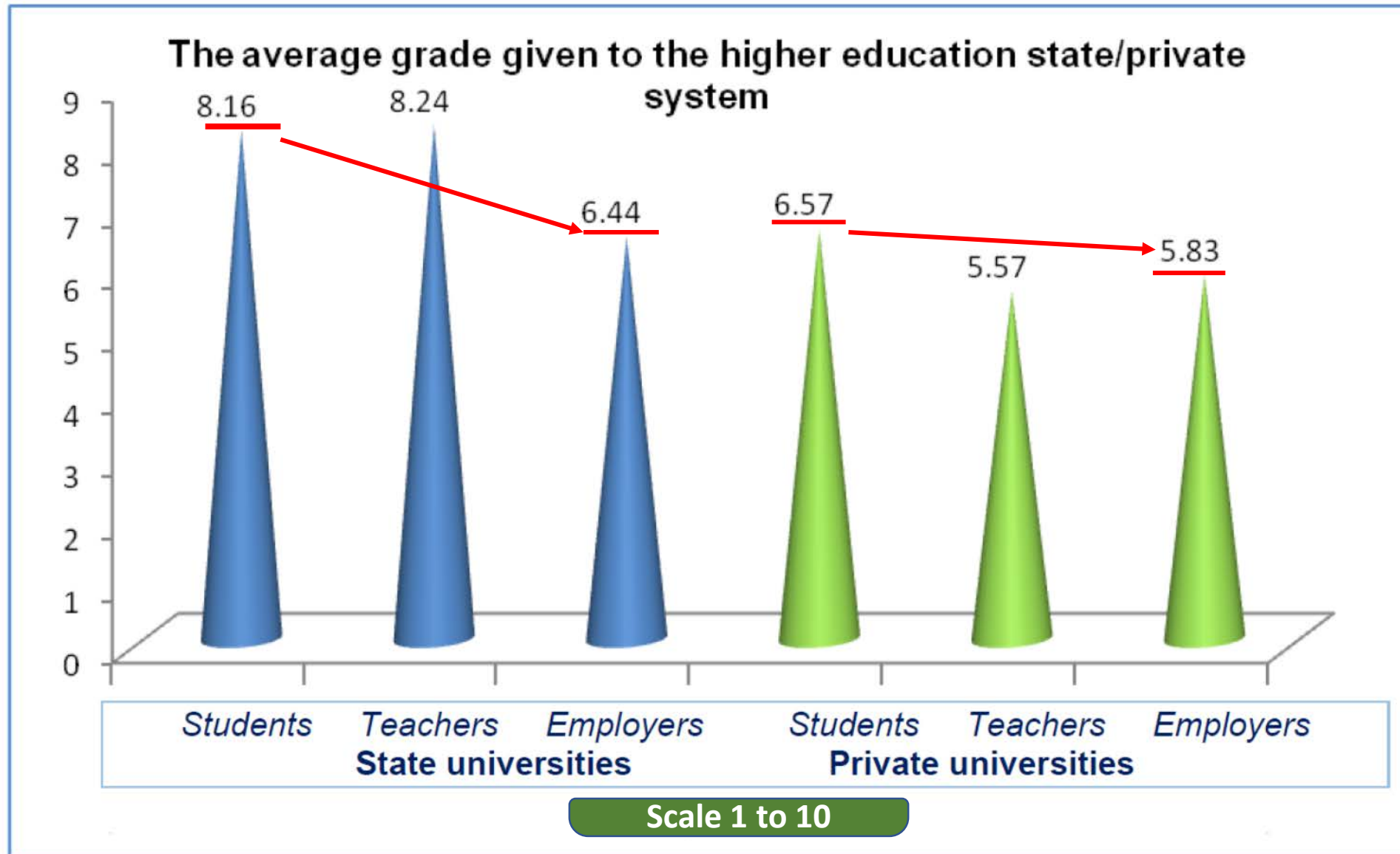
### Quality Monitor of the Romanian HE system – 2015

**PL IV activity, “*System analysis: the quality of Romanian higher education system*”, as a result of a sociological research on the perception regarding the policies and the quality of Romanian higher education system”.**

**Volume of the sample:**

**1533 students, 1454 teachers and 1572 employers**

**The stakeholders perceptions were identified and quantified from a double approach perspective: quantitative research (questionnaires) and qualitative research (interviews).**



The employers give HEI low scores ; students think they are well prepared





## UNESCO 2004

A **systematic review of educational programs** to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained.

## INQAAHE 2005

**All those attitudes, objects, actions and procedures**, which through their existence and use, and together with the quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced in and by each program.

## ESU 2015

Quality is a **multidimensional concept** that touches not only upon quality assurance (QA) procedures, but also accessibility, employability, academic freedom, public responsibility for higher education and mobility

## ESG 2015

Quality, whilst not easy to define, is **mainly a result of the interaction** between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose





## **Stakeholders engagement in QA – ARACIS approach**



# What is the degree of stakeholders' involvement at ARACIS?

## Questions and Answers

**Q: Are the stakeholders involve in ARACIS Governing Body?**

**A: See the structure of internal stakeholders at ARACIS**

**Q: Do stakeholders participate in the methodology design?**

**A: Through consultation (HEIs, Council of Rectors, Qualification Agency...)**

**The consultation process helps to disseminate quality culture**

**Submitting suggestions (ARACIS take them into account )**

**Actively being part of the designing committee**

**The methodology takes into account both institutional context and legal framework**

**Q: Do stakeholders participate in the assessment procedures design and implementation?**

**A: As part of the design committee and part of each permanent commission and assessment panel (see internal stakeholders at ARACIS)**



**Q: Has ARACIS permanent stakeholder committees?**

**A: Yes. For EUR-ACE label a Register of employers**

**Q: Can stakeholders submit suggestions to QAA about processes and their results?**

**A: During the visit on site (members of the panel)**

**Feedback questionnaire from HEIs**

**Q: Does ARACIS conduct stakeholder satisfaction surveys?**

**A: Periodically – Quality Assurance Monitor (Barometer)**

**Studies on the evaluation of the quality of ARACIS activity (Thematic analysis)**

**Q: Has ARACIS well established criteria for the stakeholder appointment?**

**A: Yes. Set by official regulations**

**Conclusion: ARACIS has mapped its approach to stakeholder involvement and management against the relevant ESGs to establish a good correlation to them.**



## ARACIS - RAQAHE

### ARACIS Council

17 academic experts + 2 students + 1 trade union + 1 employer

### Evaluators Register

Academics

Students

Employers

### Executive Office

5 membrs + 2 students + 1 trade union

### Accreditation Department

8 academic experts + 1 student +  
1 employer

### ARACIS Staff

### EQA Department

9 academic experts + 1 student +  
1 trade union

#### Permanent Commission C1

9 experts + 1 student

#### Permanent Commission C1

9 experts + 1 student

#### Permanent Commission Ci

9 experts + 1 student

#### Permanent Commission C13

9 experts + 1 student

#### Assessment Panels

3-4 experts + 1 student

#### Assessment Panels

3-4 experts + 1 student

#### Assessment Panels

3-4 experts + 1 student

#### Assessment Panels

3-4 experts + 1 student

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS at ARACIS



**A study concerning the evaluation of the  
quality of ARACIS activity by the higher  
education managers**



## The view and the objectives of present study:

### The study view

**The main goal** of the study focuses on improving the evaluation of quality in higher education periodically performed by ARACIS and on strengthening the quality management in higher education institutions.

### Objective a)

**a)** Identifying *the opinion of higher education institutions (universities)* regarding the quality of activities conducted within the process of external evaluation performed by ARACIS;

### Objective b)

**b)** Surveying *the opinion of evaluators from the NRE of ARACIS* regarding the role the agency plays in the development of the higher education system in the following period of time.

# The sampling:

**Total 879  
respondents**



**External  
survey**

**Internal survey**

**SAMPLE A –  
HEI managers**

**55 state HEI  
466 respondents**

**30 private HEI  
160 respondents**

**Total valid  
questionnaires:  
576 of 626**

**SAMPLE B -  
ARACIS ' experts**

**277 respondents  
ARACIS' experts -  
professors**

**51 respondents  
ARACIS' experts  
students**

**Total valid  
questionnaires:  
303 of 328**





# The structure of the questionnaire:

**Section I. The assessment of the services' quality offered by ARACIS (Model used: HETQMEX, SERVQUAL)**

**Sample A: 8 dimensions/30 items**  
**Sample B: 13 dimensions /48 items**

**Section II. The assessment of ARACIS' role and mission**

**2 questions/  
7 items**

**Section III. The trends and risks of HE system**

**18 trends  
15 risks**

**Section IV. Open questions**

**2 questions**

**Section V. Identification Data**

**Sample A: 5 questions**  
**Sample B: 3 questions**

# Ranking of the dimensions concerning the quality centred management in ARACIS

**Sample A - HEI management**



**Average = 8,81**

**Sample B – ARACIS' experts**



**Average = 8,86**



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

Dimension	Mean dimension total HEI	Mean dimension		Difference HEI S - HEI P
		State HEI (S)	Private HEI (P)	
1. Leadership	8,58	8,63	8,39	0,24
2. Commitment	9,15	9,16	9,11	0,05
3. Total customer satisfaction	8,81	8,93	8,42	0,51
4. Total involvement	9,14	9,22	8,89	0,33
5. Training education	8,51	8,54	8,42	0,12
6. Ownership of problem	8,41	8,41	8,42	-0,01
7. Reward and recognition	8,68	8,75	8,43	0,32
8. Teamwork	9,18	9,32	8,72	0,6
General mean	8,81	8,87	8,60	0,27



## The correlation matrix of the dimensions concerning *Quality Centred Management*

### Sample A – HEI management

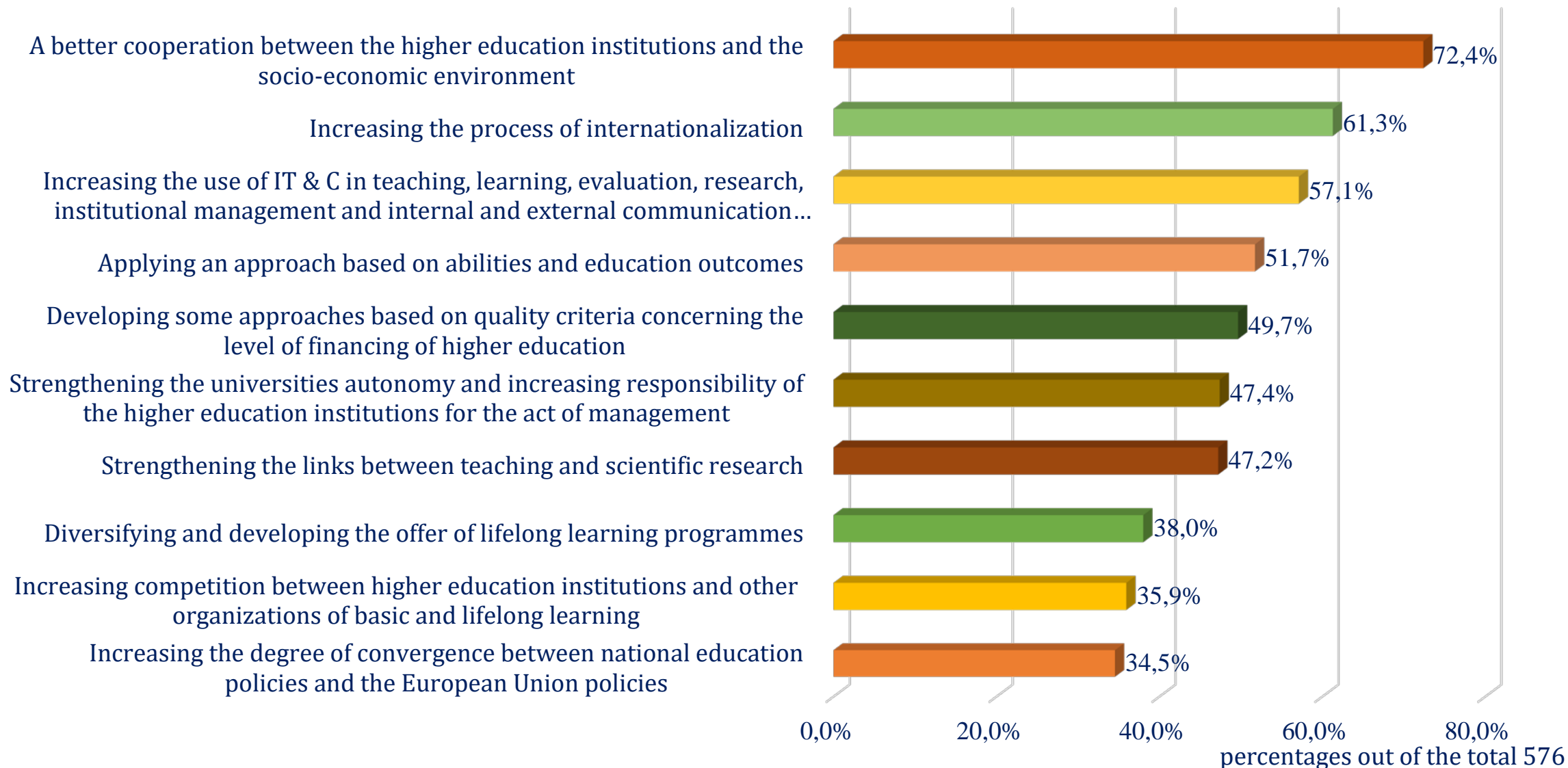
	Dimension	D.1	D.2	D.3	D.4	D.5	D.6	D.7
D.1	Total customer satisfaction (the resulting variable)	1						
D.2	Leadership	0,8054	1					
D.3	Commitment	0,6586	0,6752	1				
D.4	Total involvement	0,7675	0,7015	0,6952	1			
D.5	Training education	0,5580	0,6237	0,6124	0,6241	1		
D.6	Ownership of problem	0,7554	0,8287	0,6688	0,6988	0,6769	1	
D.7	Reward and recognition	0,7848	0,7833	0,6615	0,7353	0,6588	0,8303	1
D.8	Teamwork	0,7915	0,6831	0,6955	0,7836	0,6334	0,6852	0,78



## Mean levels of the dimensions regarding the evaluation of the mission and role of ARACIS

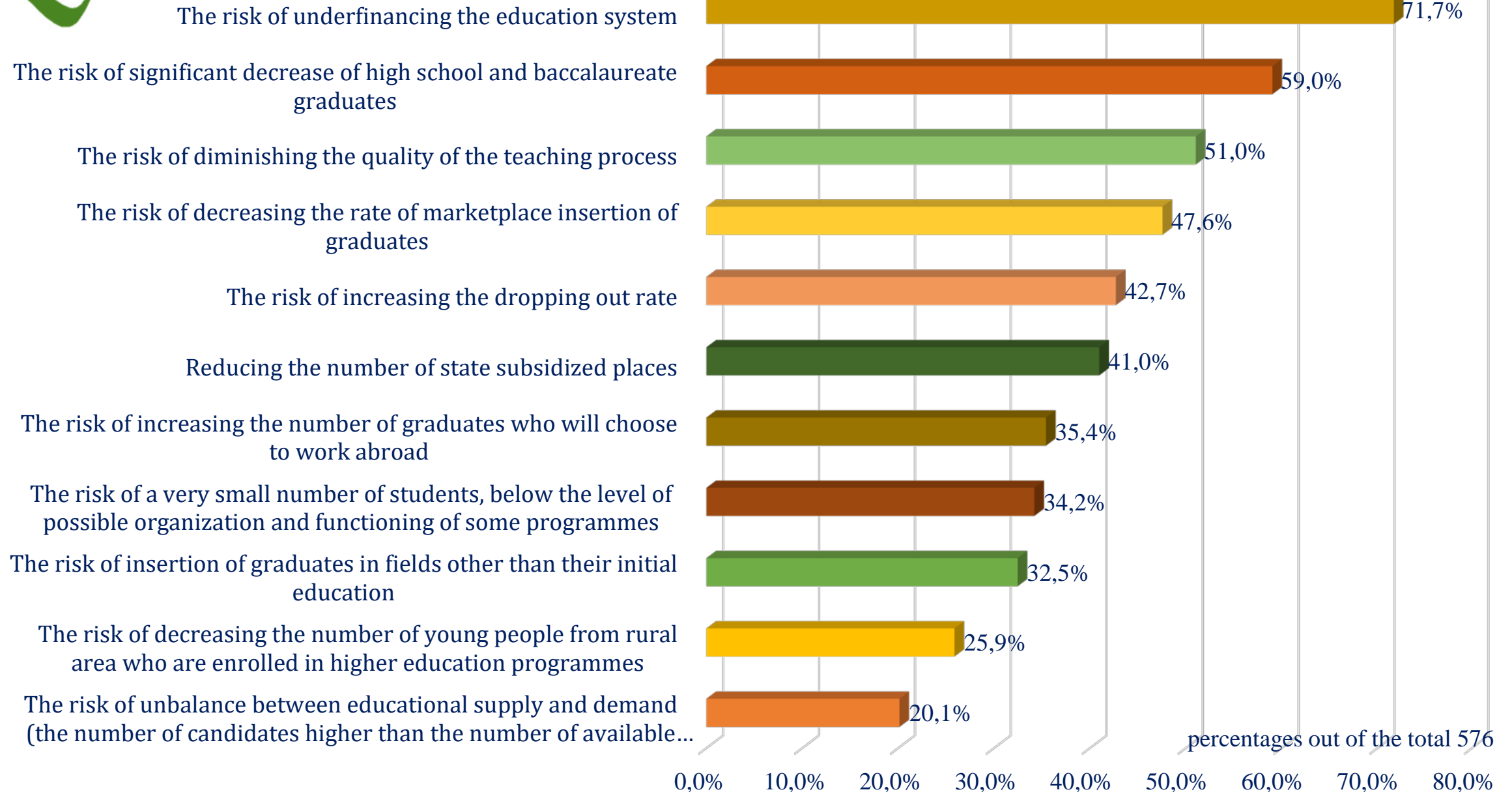
No.	Missions' components	Mean values		General mean
		State HEI	Private HEI	
1.	Testing, according to quality standards, the capacity of education providing organizations to fulfil the customers' expectations	8,95	8,71	<b>8,90</b>
2.	Contributing to the development of an institutional culture of higher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

### Ranking the top 10 trends that will influence HE in Romania in the next 5 years





## Ranking the potential risks that will influence HE in Romania in the next 5 years







## Other actions taken to enhance stakeholders' engagement in EQA

The BFUG Peer-Learning group C (PLC) on Quality Assurance (QA) identified the theme *Role and engagement of stakeholders in internal and external quality assurance* as one in which work is further needed.

The consortium led by the Romanian Ministry of National Education as national authority, includes 3 European organizations representing QAA (ENQA), universities (EURASHE) and students (ESU) and 5 quality assurance agencies from Romania, France, Bulgaria, Denmark and R. of Moldova.

The SEQA (Stakeholders Engagement in Quality Assurance) PROJECT is a Romanian initiative of MoNE, with ARACIS partner, submitted to EACEA/35/2018. Detailed elements were presented at the meeting of the PLC in Tbilisi, Georgia, December 3, 2018 - Support to the implementation of EHEA Reforms.

## SEQA proposed activities

Sharing best practices among QAAs', in regards to including stakeholders in EQA activities and ongoing development of practices

A study at EHEA member countries level will be elaborated, mapping the involvement of stakeholders in EQA activities and identifying examples of good practice.

**Development of a *Guideline on involvement of stakeholders*, to define:**

- the profile and role of different stakeholders and procedures for their recruitment
- effective ways for their involvement in EQA activities
- to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality
- approaches for increased communication
- specific training outlines, in accordance with the profile and role of different categories of stakeholders.

The Guideline will be available on-line, and will provide recommendations to the national authorities and quality assurance agencies.

## BENEFITS OF STAKEHOLDERS' INVOLVEMENT

- ✓ Creates greater mutual understanding and **builds trust**
- ✓ Increases quality assurance agencies' **transparency and accountability**
- ✓ Provides **co-responsibility** with stakeholders and increases legitimacy of assessment procedures and their results
- ✓ But Stronger involvement could lead to a potential **clash with independence?**



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**Thank you  
for your attention**

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