Institutional Evaluation Programme

Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities

PARTIUM CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of Partium Christian University. The evaluation took place in 2013 in the framework of the project "Ready for innovating, ready for better serving the local needs - Quality and Diversity of the Romanian Universities", which aims at strengthening core elements of Romanian universities, such as their autonomy and administrative competences, by improving their quality assurance and management proficiency.

The evaluations are taking place within the context of major reforms in the Romanian higher education system, and specifically in accordance with the provisions of the 2011 Law on Education and the various related normative acts.

While the institutional evaluations are taking place in the context of an overall reform, each university is assessed by an independent IEP team, using the IEP methodology described below.

1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. The IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:
- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:
- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a 'fitness for (and of) purpose' approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2. Partium Christian University's profile

Partium Christian University (PCU) is a university created in 2000 as a result of a joint initiative of the Reformed and Roman Catholic Churches. It is a private, non-profit university that caters to the Hungarian-speaking community in Bihor County and is funded by the Hungarian Government.

The university is one of several higher education institutions located in Oradea, western Romania. According to documentation provided by PCU, Oradea is home to 183,123 inhabitants, of whom 26% are of Hungarian descent. Oradea is about 70 km from Debrecen, home of the University of Debrecen, and 155 km from the university town of Cluj-Napoca. This location provides opportunities for close collaboration between PCU and Debrecen and with the Cluj-Napoca universities.

PCU enrols about 1 000 students at Bachelor and Master level distributed across three faculties. According to the self-evaluation report (SER), it counts 94 full-time academics and 71 associate staff and administrative personnel for a total of 165; during the second visit, the total staff number seemed to have risen to 180 (of whom 100 are academics).

PCU reports to three authorities – the Romanian ministry in charge of higher education, the Hungarian Parliament (through the Sapientia Foundation) and the Romanian accreditation agency ARACIS:

- As a university located in Romania, PCU must abide by the Romanian higher education legislation and submit to detailed ARACIS requirements. The team was told that these requirements affect and determine the university structures, many aspects of the study programmes, the size of student enrolment and the recruitment of academic staff.

- The Sapientia Foundation, located in Cluj-Napoca, is also an important actor in the life of PCU since it is responsible for channelling Hungarian funding to two Hungarian universities in Romania: Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Sapientia-HUT) in Cluj-Napoca and PCU in Oradea. PCU does not need to submit to the Hungarian accreditation process but, as its sole funder, the Sapientia Foundation

must approve the university strategy, any infrastructural development and the creation of new programmes on behalf of the Hungarian Government.

The SER notes that while PCU is officially considered as a private university, it prefers to define itself as a "community university" because it was funded ecumenically by the churches to serve the Hungarian minority in Romania. Thus, PCU is a private university with a public ethos and a strong commitment to serve its community. Yet, it seems that the local and regional authorities have not signalled a very strong support of the university.

PCU defines its vision as follows:

- "its strategy does not aim to promote 'fashionable' specializations that might attract a great number of students, but rather the formation of specialists who can effectively contribute to the strengthening of the Hungarian community in Romania in such domains as culture (humanistic and artistic specializations) and economy (economic specializations);"
- "PCU strives to improve the teacher training program for pre-university education on the notion that the survival of a national minority depends on the possibilities of children being schooled in their mother tongue;"
- "PCU promotes a sensible social policy regarding students with low-income or disadvantaged background, as well as students with disabilities, etc." (SER p. 3)

In keeping with IEP methodology, this evaluation report takes as its point of departure these objectives. It analyses the extent to which they are met and proposes recommendations.

In doing so, it takes into account PCU's specific context as reported by the university, particularly the fact that its pool of potential students is shrinking due to (1) the national demographic decline, (2) the weakened high school education, which leaves many high school leavers ill-equipped for higher education, and (3) the ongoing economic crisis, which is having a significant impact on Bihor county and is affecting the students' ability to pay the tuition fee.

1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a self-evaluation group that was committed to the process and seemed to have worked well together. It included the following members:

- Associate Professor Gizela Horváth, Vice-Rector, chair of the self-evaluation group
- Professor Gábor Flóra, Chancellor
- Associate Professor Brigitta Balogh, Scientific Secretary
- Lecturer Levente Székedi, Vice-Dean
- Professor Liviu Cotrău, Chair of the English Department
- Ms Annamária Berei, Administrative Director

- Ms Ildikó Boross, Head of the Rector's Cabinet Office
- Ms Orsolya Biro, Student

The self-evaluation report (SER) was sent to the whole community, including students and staff but no comments were received. The English department translated it. The SER was discussed in the Senate and amended. The self-evaluation group felt that this was a good democratic exercise that raised awareness of some institutional weaknesses. The evaluation team was informed that students paid close attention to the parts that concerned them and were satisfied with the report.

The evaluation team found the SER to be useful as a general presentation of the university but lacking quantitative data and self-reflection. A very honest and valuable SWOT analysis was included in the strategic plan but not in the SER. This weakened the impact of the SER, which could have been used as an opportunity to analyse more profoundly the university. In addition, many parts of the document identify future actions rather than provide an analysis of activities.

The self-evaluation report of PCU, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team a month before the first site visit. The two visits of the evaluation team to PCU took place from 20 to 22 May 2013 and from 17 to 20 November 2013, respectively. In between the visits, PCU provided all the additional documentation requested by the evaluation team.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:
- Prof. Carles Solà, former rector, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, team chair
- Prof. Krista Varantola, chancellor, University of Tampere, Finland
- Mr Jacob Müller, Master student, Potsdam University Berlin, Germany
- Dr Andrée Sursock, senior adviser, European University Association, Belgium, team coordinator

The team thanks Rector Szabolcs János and Vice-Rector Gizela Horváth for their cooperation and for creating an atmosphere that was propitious to an open dialogue. The team is grateful to all students and colleagues whom it met and for the stimulating discussions that took place. Special thanks are due to Ms Ildikó Boross, Head of the Rector's Cabinet Office, for the thorough preparation of the visits and for making sure that the team was able to work in optimal conditions.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

The self-evaluation report presents PCU as "a community university with a regional role, mostly serving the Hungarian minority in Romania, a university that is essentially based on Christian values, European cultural values, science as well as on the traditional values of the Hungarian communities in Romania". (SER p. 2)

After a discussion of the governance and management of PCU, this chapter will discuss PCU strategic plan in the light of this vision.

2.1 Main structures and decision-making bodies at the university level

2.1.1 The main university decision-making bodies at PCU are as follows:

- The Founders' Council includes nine members: these are representatives of the churches and external members appointed by the Pro Universitate Partium Foundation. The University Charter (Art. 94) describes the role of the Founders' Council as consultative on the following issues: "strategic planning, guidance, coordination, supervising and control." It notes that "The Founders' Council watches over the preserving and promoting of Christian and traditional values of the Hungarian community in Romania within the university life." This body, which could be compared to a Board of Trustees, has veto powers (Art. 99) and is responsible for appointing the chairman of the University Board (Art. 73).

- The University Board is currently chaired by the vice-president of the Founders' Council and includes the rector (as vice-chair), the vice-rector, the deans, the administrative director general/administrator, two representatives of the Founders' Council and a student representative. The chancellor and the scientific secretary "are standing guests at the Board meetings." (University Charter, Art. 73). This body meets weekly and is responsible for the daily operations of the university and for executing the Senate's decisions.

- The Senate includes 23 elected members: 17 faculty members and six students. It establishes its own subcommittees and elects its own president, who is currently a member of the Founder's Council. The Senate is the place where university policies are discussed and decided. It is defined in the University Charter as the "highest decisional and debating forum at the university level" (Art. 63). Indeed, the Senate discusses issues that range from academic to administrative ones, including staffing issues (appointment, promotions, etc.).

In order to ensure joint-up decision-making between these bodies:

- The president of the Founders' Council and the chairman of the University Board attend the Senate meetings (University Charter, Art. 67).

- The rector is chosen through a process controlled by the Senate: the Senate constitutes a list of candidates and appoints a committee, with faculty representatives, representatives from the founders, two rectors from abroad, and representatives from civil society. The committee chooses between the candidates that have been selected by the Senate. The rector signs management contracts with both the Founders' Council and the Senate.

2.1.2 University structures

The university has three faculties – human and social studies, economics, and arts – and 14 departments, one of which, the department of agricultural engineering, is run by the University of Debrecen. According to the documentation provided there are eight research workshops and three research centres. The evaluation team was also told that a small group of university staff opened a private foundation to apply for research grants. This foundation seems very loosely associated, if at all, to the university.

The University Charter emphasises that faculties and departments enjoy scientific, didactic, administrative and financial autonomy, within the confines of the Charter. The Senate is responsible for creating, merging, and dissolving these structures. The Senate is also responsible for the Institute of Theological Sciences (IST), which is no longer considered a faculty and whose director is appointed by the rector.

The mode of designation of the deans is as follows: each faculty elects two candidates, who are required to present a four-year management plan (that fits with the rector's plan), to a decision-making committee that includes the rector, representatives of the founders and from the faculty concerned.

The team was told that the role of deans has changed from a scientific to an executive management function. The faculty councils decide and the deans execute. The role of dean is to coordinate activities and increase cooperation among the different departments, listen to the needs of departments and support their development, and look for financial resources.

The role of the heads of department is to organise the teaching and research activities.

The decision-making process between the departments and the faculties is bottom up:

- Issues are discussed during department meetings;
- Decisions are taken by the department council, which include the department head, the vice-head and the department secretary;

- The decisions go to the Faculty Council (which includes all department heads). The Faculty Council's responsibilities include: the quality and organisation of teaching, scientific issues, and administrative problems;
- If necessary these decisions go up to the university Senate.

As will be discussed in section 2.4, faculties receive a budget, which is allocated to the departments, according to a formula based on student and staff numbers. The departments manage their own budgets. Staffing decisions are taken by the departments in agreement with their deans. Departments are required to report scientific achievement, problems and evaluation results to their respective faculty.

2.1.3 Analysis and recommendation

The team notes that the Founders' Council is involved in PCU in a deeper way than a Board of Trustees would. As evidence, its vice-president chairs the University Board, which is the operational and executive body of the university.

In addition, it appears that the university structures and organisation are extremely complex, particularly in view of its small size. Thus, CPU has:

- Three reporting authorities: the Hungarian Parliament, the Romanian ministry in charge of higher education and ARACIS.
- Four decision-making bodies:
    - The Founders' Council
    - The University Board
    - The Senate
    - The Rectorate
- Three faculties and 11 departments
- A number of research institutes
- A private foundation that is not formally included in PCU's organisation chart

Given the size of the university, it appears to the team that the university is unnecessarily fragmented and layered.

Thus, the evaluation team notes the following:

- The Faculty of Economics has one department only, which appeared like an unnecessary layer of management. (The goal of this faculty is to develop more programmes and create two departments once it reaches a threshold number of teaching staff.)
- There are a number of very small departments but resistance to merging them was reported to come from both academic and administrative staff.

The team was repeatedly told that this complexity is in response to ARACIS requirements and that the accreditation of study programmes is conditioned on a number of requirements related to such structures as faculties and departments. In other words, when ARACIS accredits an institution, the team was told that it expects to see both a faculty and a department structure and requires that faculties correspond to the field of studies being evaluated. In the past, PCU had one faculty but was asked by ARACIS to split it into three to reflect the three fields of its academic offer: economic, arts and social and human sciences.

Whatever its cause, this fragmentation comes at the cost of the university's effectiveness and efficiency and does not seem to be quite in keeping with the 2011 law, which specifies that universities

> …may comprise the following organizational components: faculties, departments, institutes, centre or laboratories, design facilities, consultancy centres, university clinics, artistic studios and workshops, theatres, museums, centres for continuous learning of the human resources, services and micro-production facilities, experimental stations, and other entities for production and know-how and technologic transfer. Technical and administrative services also operate in the structure of higher educational institutions. (Art. 131 (1))

It seems clear from this article of law, that not all universities are expected to have all these structures. This is signalled by the use of the words "may comprise" and by the long list provided that cannot be expected in all types of institutions: e.g. university clinics, experimental stations, artistic studios.

Therefore it would be useful for PCU to seek greater clarity as to why faculties and departments seem to be required, particularly because many very successful universities in Europe have eliminated faculties or regrouped them into much larger entities such as schools. This allows better use of human and financial resources and greater opportunities for interdisciplinarity.

Several weaknesses are identified in PCU's Strategic Plan (p.6). These may well have their root cause in this fragmentation and multi-layered structures:

- "Management problems (division of duties, deadlines, "extensions", non-observance of decision levels, etc.;"
- "Deficient inter-departmental cooperation (few interdisciplinary projects, duplicate subjects);"
- "The financial aspects related to the functioning of the faculties (and of their departments) are not transparent enough;"
- "The faculties management has limited powers in managing financial resources;"

- "Problems concerning the division of duties within departments (resulting in the young PhD candidates' work overload."

At PCU, this fragmentation was mitigated by a number of introductory courses that are common to several departments within a faculty. The university also started to develop common modules across faculties to cut costs. The evaluation team lauds this type of initiatives, which can increase the intellectual dynamism of the university through multidisciplinarity.

Recommendations:

- ➤ *The university should explore every permissible avenue to simplify its structures.*
- ➤ *The university should consider making a better distinction between the role of the Founders' Council as the keeper of the university vision and values and the University Board that is responsible for the day-to-day operations of PCU. This would ensure that the Founders' Council has sufficient independence to guide the institution and vice versa.*

2.2 Students' involvement in governance

The self-evaluation report (p.4) mentions that PCU respects national legislation in relation to the students' involvement in the university and provides the following details:

- Students are present in the deliberative bodies and their respective committees, with a right to vote;
- PCU supports the students' association;
- "The Students' Association is a partner in all actions the university promotes, not only promoting its image, but also in national-international research programs and partnerships." (SER, p.4)

The SER mentions also (p.13) that students make up 25% of the Faculty Councils and the Senate. Beyond this legal requirement, student representatives "participate in the management of the dormitory, take part in the distribution of students in the dormitory, awarding social grants, and delegate a representative to the Quality Evaluation and Assurance Committee. Due to systematic feedback procedures, student assessment of teaching is also taken in consideration."

The site visit meetings yielded additional information:

- Students participate in the Faculty Councils but not in the Department Councils.
- Each student cohort has one elected student representative who would help with any difficulty encountered by fellow students.

- The student association is focused heavily on social events.
- The elected students are not necessarily members of the association and association members seeking election do not present themselves as member of the association.
- The funding of the student association is determined by PCU as part of the university budget and thus could fluctuate from year to year.

Although the team recognises the involvement of students in university governance and in university life, it notes that a student association heavily focused on social activities is not equipped to represent students' views in any way. Moreover, this type of association does not address the main issues confronted by students, such as the high dropout rate in the first year (cf. Chapter 3). Thus, the association students reported that they had a conflict with academic staff during the orientation of new students over the balance between academic and social activities. The students wanted more social time while the departments wanted to devote more time to the academic portion of the orientation activities. Thus the impression formed by the team is that students did not expect to play any other role beyond organising social activities.

There is a need for students to be organised better and to be able to act collectively as a stakeholder body. This would increase their sense of responsibility toward their peers and would allow the emergence of a stronger, more responsible student leadership. A more robust student leadership would be useful for the strategic development of PCU.

Recommendation:

➢ *PCU should strengthen the stakeholder role of students by working with them to develop a representative association whose main mission will be to serve collectively as the voice of students. The European Student Union (ESU) or student associations in other universities in Hungary or Romania could provide some expertise in this area.*

2.3 Staffing issues

PCU documentation shows that there are 94 full-time academic staff at the university, 44 of whom have a PhD. The number of full professors has been increased to ten recently thanks to the addition of a number of newly retired Hungarian professors who will commute to Oradea from Budapest and Debrecen. This recruitment will increase PCU's academic capacity and, the team was told, will satisfy an ARACIS requirement during the next institutional accreditation.

The team observed that the staff was committed to their students and engaged in university decision-making at least to the extent that the same staff members turned up in different committees. This is related to the small size of PCU and its layered structures.

The teaching load differs by status: seven hours per week for full professors, eight hours per week for associate professors, and twelve hours per week for assistant professors (*lectors*), teaching assistants (*asistent*) and junior teaching assistants (*preparator*). Staff reported that the teaching load is not so great as to prevent colleagues from being active in research but salaries are low, which leads to a strategy of combining jobs – teaching and administration – to ensure a decent standard of living. The team was told that this left little time to keep up with one's field, ensure the quality of teaching and provide time for research.

The SWOT included in the Strategic Plan acknowledged that younger staff are overloaded with teaching duties (p.6) but the interviews revealed that reducing the teaching load may create severe resistance from the teachers, most of whom are reported to be looking for a stable income.

The strategic plan notes, as one weakness, the "relatively high number of substitute teachers (paid by the hour)" (pp. 5-6) and a "shortage of PhD staff in some departments" (p. 6). A great number of teachers are alumni of this university. When hiring new teaching staff, it is not a condition to have a PhD; staff could be working on a PhD. Currently, about 50% of staff members hold a PhD, and of those, half are issued by Romanian universities (in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca and Timisoara) and half by Hungarian universities (in Budapest, Debrecen and Pécs). Of the 42 teaching staff enrolled in PhD programmes, 18 are scheduled to finish their PhD in 2014. PCU is monitoring their progress. Those who will not be able to finish their PhD by 2015 will have to be let go in order to comply with a new Romanian legal requirement.

Mastery of the Hungarian language is a requirement for Hungarian-taught disciplines and specialisations. The team was told that there are some recruitment difficulties in economics because of the small pool of Hungarian-speaking economists in Romania and the university has to turn to the private sector to recruit professionals with PhDs for whom teaching at the university is a second job.

Salaries are low at PCU and reported to be lower than at the public universities but the hiring and promotion freeze that had been in effect in the Romanian public sector were reported to have made PCU attractive to academics who wanted to advance their career during this time of crisis.

The small size of the university results in asking teachers to teach in different disciplines outside their speciality. Given the very layered structures at the university, the volume of administrative tasks is important; these are sometimes delegated to PhD students, causing delays in the completion of their theses.

There are no extra funds to develop incentive measures and limited staff development opportunities although some departments mentor young teachers.

The technical and administrative staff members report to the chief financial officer, whom the team met. There was no time to meet the other senior administrators but the team notes positively that senior administrative posts seemed to be filled by administrators rather than academics.

Recommendation:

➢ *PCU should strengthen staff development opportunities and develop incentives to encourage academic staff's involvement in applied research opportunities.*

2.4 Funding

According to the SER (p. 8), 82% of PCU funding comes from Hungary. No funding is received from the Romanian Government. The Hungarian Government calculates funding based on the number of students and provides the level of funding that the Romanian Government would have granted. The unit cost is low: 3 400 euro per student.

The Hungarian Government also may agree to pay for once-off infrastructural development projects. Thus, PCU recently purchased a building in Oradea, which will require considerable restoration.

Half of the students pay an annual fee ranging between 300 and 450 euro depending on the specialisation (this tuition fee level corresponds to the Romanian average); the other half receives a scholarship. Some of the fee-paying students receive some form of scholarship as well. A few projects have raised some income but if a faculty manages to raise extra funding, the university does not collect an overhead even though it might be calculated in grant and project applications.

The combination of the level of Hungarian funding and the fact that there is no Romanian funding results in a low and uncertain funding level and, therefore, limited opportunity for multiyear planning. Specifically:

- The Hungarian funds cover the salary costs and there is insufficient income to cover the operational budget. The university has a deficit that it addresses with short-term solutions such as getting a bridge loan or an advance payment from the Sapientia Foundation. Structural solutions to the deficit are being sought through the development of an adult education centre.

- The team was told that the obligation to fund PCU is written in the Hungarian constitution and that this protects the university; the team notes, however, that a political change in Hungary might affect the funding level provided to PCU. This threat does not seem to be built into the budgetary assumptions and few interlocutors communicated this concern to the team.

A yearly budget is submitted to the Sapientia Foundation for approval, following discussions in the Senate. The university reports monthly to the Foundation on the execution of its budget.

As mentioned earlier, the internal funding allocation is based on student numbers, as well as the number of staff and their rank in each department. According to the SER (p.11) there is a principle of subsidiarity in providing departments with decision-making powers in respect of their budget: "the department is a decision-making body regarding the division of sums for teaching staff mobility, the transportation of associate staff (residing in other cities), acquisition of books and teaching materials, the organisation of scientific events, purchasing supplies, etc." The departments also determine the level of salary bonus received by staff based on their performance.

Recommendations:

> ➢ *Every legal avenue to diversify funding sources should be actively pursued in order to ensure the long-term financial stability of PCU.*
> ➢ *PCU need to develop more room for manoeuvre to address the deficit and create seed money funding that would allow strategic developments. This would enable PCU to develop investment plans and the incentives that are missing at the moment. In order to do so, PCU should consider changing its internal allocation model and enforce its overhead policy to capture some extra funding.*

2.5 Strategic plan

The strategic plan for the period 2012-2016 states that the key strategic priority for that period is "the ranking of PCU as an education- and research-centred university, followed by a higher ranking of its study programme." (p.8) The plan identifies the two key conditions to meet this goal: to attract qualified academic staff and to increase the international visibility of research activities.

This is then followed by a very long list of 18 objectives (pp. 8-9) that are a combination of actions that are absolutely fundamental (e.g. securing the accreditation of programmes) to others whose centrality does not seem as urgent to the external observer (e.g. establishing a branch in Satu-Mare, about 130 km away). Further objectives are identified as the plan unfolds and it is impossible for external readers to understand many aspects of this plan because the objectives are not always explained.

This being said, during the site visits, the team understood that PCU was not interested in increasing significantly the size of the university or the number of study programmes, apart from taking ownership of the agricultural science degree (currently delivered by the University of Debrecen), which responds to regional needs. Rather, the university is

interested in emphasising teachers training at all levels and lifelong learning (including the continuing education of teachers), through blended learning. The university also realises that its international visibility is weak and has started to address this by organising international conferences and publishing the proceedings.

The evaluation team understood that two processes were at work in developing the strategy:

- A bottom-up process involving the whole academic community in which every department prepared a plan. The strategic plan is a synthesis of all these plans. This process is most probably responsible for the long list of disparate objectives that are interconnected and are not integrated into a cohesive plan.
- A top-down process with the Founders' Council setting the institutional vision and the major strategic orientations. These are inspirational and aspirational. They express for instance the wish to see PCU become a research-active university and doubling the size of the student body.

In addition, the evaluation team notes that the strategic plan lacks quantitative measures, appropriate performance indicators, milestones, identification of responsibilities, etc. This results in a lack of monitoring. Thus, the university has bottom-up and top-down processes but there is a gap in between to the extent that there is no committee, unit or person responsible for monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan.

Finally, the weaknesses identified by PCU are not addressed in the strategic plan even though the SWOT is included in that document.

Recommendations:

➤ *PCU should address the weaknesses identified in its SWOT analysis.*

➤ *PCU should revise its strategic plan in the light of the following questions:*
- *Starting with the mission – catering to the Hungarian minority – what are the major demographic threats faced by PCU and how can these be overcome? (These include, for instance, the demographic downturn in Romania; the attraction of the Hungarian universities across the border.)*
- *What could be the regional role that PCU can play, given that the regional economy is based on services, tourism and microelectronics?*
- *How can PCU capitalise on one of its strengths, the fact that its academic staff members have earned their PhDs from different universities?*

➤ *Once the priorities are established, it will be important:*
- *To develop a strategic plan that can be explained in one or two pages maximum.*

- *To develop an action plan with milestones, division of labour, and performance indicators.*
- *To charge a committee, a unit or a person with the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the plan and report progress to the University Board. This would involve a yearly review to examine the progress achieved and to adapt the plan accordingly, while taking into account changes in the external and institutional contexts.*

3. Teaching and Learning

CPU's objectives in the area of teaching and learning are set out in the University Charter:

- Art. 13 states the following objective for the university:

  "ensuring the process of higher education in the Hungarian language, in the spirit of Hungarian educational traditions, and of Christian values; offering services for lifelong learning for people working in the field of education – both teaching and auxiliary staff – as well as for the people involved in management, guiding and control at the pre-university level, through tuition in one's mother tongue, at all levels, types and forms of pre-university education, under the terms of the law."

- Art. 18 emphasises "the interdependence of teaching and research".

The evaluation team notes that PCU is a university committed to quality and standards. The small size of student groups translates into favourable staff to student ratio in many departments. The staff whom the team met appeared motivated and very caring. They have the obligation to hold office hours (1h/week) but are in fact available more often. Each class tutor will advise a group of students (in economics, the groups can be as large as 50 students). Tutors will intervene if they see a student in difficulty for any type of problems. A pastor is present in the student residences and attends the meetings of the student association.

Students seem happy and satisfied and some of them come back for a second degree. Some students have selected PCU because of its small size, which results in a good staff to student ratio. Others ended up at PCU as a second choice or by accident. All expressed satisfaction, particularly because of the close links to their teachers.

The university is making an effort to develop the multi-linguistic skills of students and to provide specific support to its most gifted students. Thus, the Janus Pannonius College of Excellence currently enrols a small group of 67 outstanding students who benefit from personalised attention and participate in research groups, professional trips and specialised training. Students are required to present a scientific paper at the annual "Partium Scientific Student Conference".

In addition, a subgroup of these students receives the "Árpád Pető scholarship", for outstanding professional and community work. In the academic year 2012/13, nine students received 1 000 USD and 12 received 500 USD. The team notes with interest these initiatives targeting talented and motivated students but it did not have the opportunity to meet any of these students and could not discuss their specific experience.

PCU's strengths in teaching and learning are counterbalanced by some important weaknesses. First the implementation of the Bologna reforms has not gone beyond the notion of cycles and the introduction of ECTS. For the most part, teaching is *ex cathedra* and the students are in the classroom seven hours, four days a week. Attendance is taken and students have the obligation to be in class 70% of the time (50% for those who are working). A group of students reported that their schedule is overloaded: they are often in class the whole day, with just one hour free at lunch and they complain that their timetable changes. This seems to be related to teachers who commute and who are sometimes late. Thus, teaching is still teacher-centred rather than student-centred. There was very little evidence of active learning and ECTS was the unit to calculate both the students' and the teacher's workloads. The fact that contact hours are the basis of salaries renders the system very rigid as well.

Second, despite the available student support services, the dropout rate is very high during the first year, (although this depends on the discipline). The evaluation team discussed this point with the leadership, the academics and the students. It seems that there is a consensus that this dropout rate is both unavoidable and acceptable. The following anecdotal reasons were presented to the team:

- Students can start several specialisations and select one at the end of the year or they will start one specialisation and then change due to changing interest. They will be counted as "drop out" when in fact it is a change of mind.
- Many students are underprepared and do not have a very good background for their specialisation. The team was told that because there is no vocational education in Romania, everyone goes to university where teaching is more theoretical and there is no entrance examination in general.
- Some students have financial difficulties and they might find a job outside the region.

To reduce the dropout rate, PCU introduced a tutorial system and personalised attention, but academic staff will not try to retain reluctant students. The private universities have a poor reputation in Romania and PCU is keen to be perceived as a quality university, even at the cost of failing some students. In the words of one academic the "dropout rate is a seal of quality". Another one stated: "I know the name of everyone of my students, their personal stories, the problems at home, their projects; I do not want to retain 100% of my students because I would be giving diplomas away and cheapening the diploma of the good students."

In the course of the discussions, the ideas advanced by the evaluation team to remedy this situation were rejected:

- How about an open first year to let students select their major after experimenting with their interest? The response given is that ARACIS defines 80% of the study programmes at Bachelor level and its quality assurance system is rigid. Therefore, it is

impossible to offer an open first year and innovative programmes are difficult to be approved although some teachers have entertained this idea.

- What about introducing an entrance examination and better information that would allow students to assess if a study programme corresponds to their interests and strengths? This might scare students away. Up to a couple of years ago, PCU could choose its students; now the university has to take most of them because of the demographic decline, even if they are not sufficiently motivated to study.

After the first year, it seems that students are well supported by their teachers who are keen to see them succeed. In music for instance, each student is paired with one professor. In economics, students are attracted by the closeness to the teachers; the teachers know their family problems; professors are advising the students. However, student demand is higher for certain programmes; this results in discrepancies in student to staff ratio across faculties. Moreover, the profile of PCU as a "community university" serving the Hungarian minority means that some programmes will be maintained even if enrolments are very low (e.g. 10 students are admitted in music every year).

Third, the team found the learning infrastructure to be wanting: some classrooms were inadequate (e.g. lack of sound-reducing insulation in music); students with mobility impairment could not access any of the buildings visited by the evaluation team; the library was very poor (i.e. physical space, library stocks and electronic access to material) although the team notes the plans to move the library to the newly acquired building.

The self-evaluation report (p. 21) mentions several projects, but few address these weaknesses. These new projects are:

- Offering study programmes with a double specialisation (e.g. English language and literature);
- Developing core modules in order to increase efficiency;
- Improving the ranking of its accredited programmes;
- Responding better to regional market demands;
- Consolidating the Colloquia Language Centre to offer language courses and organise language tests;
- Developing a joint Master's degree programme as a first step toward developing doctoral education.

Recommendations:

➢ *In the evaluation team's view, PCU needs to promote the spirit of the Bologna reforms and to introduce student-centred learning. This means that the notion of contact hours to*

define teachers' workload must encompass a variety of teaching techniques – not just ex cathedra lectures and seminars.

➢ *PCU should address the dropout rate because it is fundamental to its educational mission and would improve its financial situation since funding is based on student numbers. The first step will be to document why students drop out and, second, to develop targeted solutions.*

➢ *The library stock and electronic access to library material should be expanded. Possibilities for developing interlibrary cooperation with other universities in Oradea should be explored.*

➢ *The need to address access of mobility-impaired students is a matter of urgency. This will also benefit staff and visitors to the university.*

4.   Research

Research at PCU is led by a scientific secretary and supported by a number of structures, including:

- A number of research centres, which apparently are used to apply for research grants. They are led by elected directors who receive no extra income for this task. These centres do not have a legal status. The team was told that ARACIS accreditation of Masters require that each study programme demonstrate a research component; therefore there is an institute even if the human resources between the department and research institute overlap – sometimes completely.
- A private foundation, managed independently from PCU, regroups a number of academics for the same purposes to apply for research grants.
- The team was also informed that the National Science Council has a process for accrediting universities as scientific centres and therefore there is also a university research centre that regroups all research in order to be able to satisfy this requirement.
- The Sapientia's Institute of Research Programmes (IRP), funded by the Sapientia Foundation, organises and coordinates research activities. It provides a small number of PhD scholarships and conference funding for both Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Sapientia-HUT) and PCU. The president of IRP is appointed by Sapientia-HUT (which also provides the administrative support) and the vice-president by CPU. Last academic year, six PCU academics received PhD scholarships and seven were able to participate in international conferences.

There are ongoing efforts to develop applied research projects that would be funded regionally and focused on regional issues and to organise international conferences to establish PCU's international footprint. Funds come from the Sapientia foundation and other sources. Thus, the university implemented, as lead or project partner, 14 cross-border projects, within the framework of the Hungary-Romania Cross-Border Cooperation Programme between 2007 and 2013 (ERDF funding), with an total amount of funding to PCU of about 617 400 EUR. These projects needed to be pre-financed and the university secured a bank loan. As a result, PCU lost money through this operation since the grants did not cover the interest on the loan.

The university has an excellent research strategy, with clear priorities and milestones and the intention of developing multidisciplinarity in this area. PCU would like to develop its research activities in cooperation with Hungarian universities and try to secure European Social Funds for larger scale programmes. The thematic research priorities are (SER p.6):

- Language, culture and identity

- Regional development
- The Hungarian community in Romania; Transylvanian cultures
- Concepts and practices of social justice
- Higher education and the education medium
- Art and media of communication

The strategy was recently revised in spring 2013 but it is not clear how the plan is promoted and monitored.

PCU publishes one general university journal and intends to have several more specialised journals. There is awareness of the need to encourage staff to publish in international peer-reviewed journals (currently, a rather insignificant number do), and academic staff would agree that if promotions were based on publications, this would provide an incentive for research.

Some of the research leaders, however, tend to think that the thematic research focus on regional issues would hold little interest outside the region. Nevertheless, the team believes that because this border region has been at the centre of European history, a regional research of high quality would have international appeal. More concrete obstacles, in its view, are the heavy teaching load and the lack of both institutional incentives and external funding (cf. section 2.4).

The general impression formed by the evaluation team is that PCU is focused on teaching and has a very small international footprint. The Strategic Plan 2012-2016 and the self-evaluation report, however, state that PCU would like to change classification and be ranked as a research and education university. As part of this aspiration, PCU would like to open a doctoral school.

The evaluation team advises the university that it will take time to build the academic capacity that would support a doctoral school and that this would involve high investment costs. Given the budget deficit, this project seems out of reach at the moment.

In addition, it is clear that the number of structures related to research seems excessive given the actual research output.

Recommendations:

- ➢ *In order to increase further research capacity, CPU should focus in the first instance on developing:*
  - *Master's level study programmes;*
  - *Applied research on regional cross-border themes and, in general, closer links with local entrepreneurs.*

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IEP
EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

EUA
European University Association

> *In order to increase its international footprint, CPU should encourage staff to publish internationally (i.e. in English) and consider this as one criterion for the annual salary bonuses and the promotions.*

> *If PCU is able to implement the recommendation to develop seed money (cf. section 2.4), this could be used to fund research-related activities, with a view of consolidating the university's capacity for interdisciplinary and applied projects focused on regional issues. The main goals would be to contribute to society and to improve PCU's standing in the region.*

5. Service to society

As discussed in Section 1.2, PCU defines itself as a "community university". As such, there are ongoing efforts to respond to local and regional needs through the educational offer and some consultancy activities. The university also offers a range of cultural activities – about 100 per year – many of which are local or regional.

PCU students cooperate with their counterparts, particularly from the University of Oradea, to organise common social events. This is in line with PCU's commitment to the region and the good relationships the university maintains with local and regional institutions. Thus, the SER (pp. 13-14) states that:

> PCU promotes intercultural dialogue carried out in the spirit of the ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralism of the region. Collaborations with public institutions, Romanian universities in the region (especially the State University of Oradea and Emanuel University), as well as other local and regional organizations, reflect PCU's open character. Cooperation with other institutions validates the crucial role PCU assumes in the region and in the cross-border area (e.g. participation in a great number of European cross-border projects, bilateral agreements with universities from bordering Hungarian counties).

The two major priorities for CPU are, first, to develop a lifelong learning offer through the Telos Centre for Continuous Training and, second, to establish an alumni network (the alumni database has been created already).

The evaluation team notes that PCU graduates are appreciated by employers and contribute to the economic development of the region. The growing tourism industry requires multilingual students while local companies that work across the border require bilingual students. External stakeholders described students as being self-directed and mature. The university sees its role as maintaining the Hungarian minority presence in the region – culturally, politically and in economic terms.

Applied research has not been identified as a priority by the university. Two years ago, PCU sociologists administered an opinion poll for a transportation company (12,000 euro). A similar consultancy about cultural activities is being planned.

Recommendations:

- ➢ *Expand applied research as the avenue that would allow PCU to develop more research experience and income.*
- ➢ *In order to allow academic staff to engage in such research, PCU should look for ways to reduce both the teaching load and the administrative duties – the latter, through*

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streamlining and simplifying the university structures.

➢ *PCU should explore every opportunity to improve its links with the local community in order to increase local support.*

6. Quality culture

PCU has in place the following processes and structures:

- A Senate committee on quality and faculty QA liaisons who meet about four or five times a year;
- The evaluation of academic staff via a self-evaluation, as well as evaluations by students, peers and deans;
- Providing staff development to young teachers through mentorship, at least in some departments;
- Monitoring student progression.

The team was told that the university plans to develop a tracking system of its graduates; this is in response to a Hungarian and a Romanian requirement and will be used to develop longitudinal tracking data associated with alumni.

The team received contradictory evidence as to how evaluations are integrated into salary discussions. It was told that the amount of the 13th-month salary (i.e. bonus level) was based on performance but heard also that the evaluation process is new and not integrated into salary and promotion discussions.

The team received a number of comments that show that a quality culture is not yet embedded in the university:

- Some senior staff spoke about evaluation fatigue and a compliance culture. This is captured in the following quote: "Everybody in this country is used to writing ARACIS reports, covering up, just meeting expectations."
- The students are not aware of the way that the results are used and if they lead to improvements. They noted that the small size of the university allows problems to be addressed quickly and locally and that the evaluation process was pointless.
- The Senate and the faculty and department councils do not seem to discuss the aggregate results of the evaluations and to use them in order to improve the study programmes.
- Quality assurance is focused on teaching; research activities are monitored and evaluated on the basis of formal reports, which are collected and centralised by the scientific secretaries at department, faculty and institutional levels. There is no evaluation of administrative services yet.

Recommendations to create a quality culture across the university:
- ➢ *Develop user-friendly QA tools and processes;*
- ➢ *Use the results and explain how the results are used;*
- ➢ *Expand QA processes to monitor the administrative services.*

7.   Internationalisation

PCU has been developing some international activities beyond its cooperation with Hungarian universities. Some departments (e.g. fine arts, economics, music) have organised international events and conferences. Erasmus mobility has started although it is still very modest and requires strengthening; thus, some students reported recognition problems and lack of accurate information particularly for incoming students. The Centre for International Cooperation reports directly to the rector and the team was told that there are committees in charge of internationalisation in the faculties.

PCU does not have yet an international strategy beyond the goal of offering modules in English and developing the multilingual skills of students. The lack of strategy is captured in the University Charter that presents disparate elements of PCU's international engagement:

> Participating in international cooperation and the international scientific prestige are criteria for evaluating the results of the activity of the departments and research units. Faculties and departments publish on regular bases self-introductory materials in several world languages, meant to encourage international contacts. Faculties and the university regularly publish a brochure, in a world language, briefly describing the study programmes, scientific research units and publications by faculty members. The Councils of the Faculties and the Senate examine annually the extent and efficiency of international cooperation and adopts the necessary measures. (Art. 59)

Nevertheless, the SER (p. 8) defines a vision on which the university can build an internationalisation strategy and an action plan. It states that the regional dimension of the university does not stand in opposition to its potential European and international appeal:

> PCU defines itself primarily as a university with a regional role. This regional status of the university is reflected by the geographical origin of the students and by the fact that the university's educational offer, as well as its cultural and scientific activities, are based on the needs of the country's Northern and Western regions.

> However, this regionalism must be understood in the European context, implying that the university ought to assume an international role. PCU has close relationships with universities in the Eastern border areas of Hungary that are geographically close and belong to regions that face the same problems that the Bihor County has to deal with (e.g., multilingualism, social problems, Romani issues etc.)

This vision, however, does not seem to be widely shared and the notion of joining European research networks working on issues of regional identity had not occurred to academic staff members whom the team met. Cleary, PCU needs to value more what it could bring to the intellectual debate in Europe.

The meetings also revealed a lack of general awareness of European associations that could provide the university with opportunities to benchmark informally and develop European partnerships.

Recommendations:

➢ *Develop accurate information targeted at incoming students and ensure that staff is equipped to deal with the expansion of international activities;*
➢ *Expand number of modules in English;*
➢ *Explore the possibility of joining European associations, including disciplinary networks;*
➢ *Develop a strategy that would address the following questions: Why internationalise? Which are the geographical targets? The topics? How to develop research capacity through internationalisation? Who should lead these developments and how to monitor them? What language policy would support this internationalisation strategy?*

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are a number of priorities requiring attention urgently:

- Ensuring the financial sustainability of the institution, which means finding structural solutions to the financial deficit, including through the simplification of university structures.

- Reducing the dropout rate in the first year to keep in line with the central mission of CPU and take into account that a high dropout rate could be harmful to the reputation of the institution.

- Shifting to more active learning.

- Improving staff skills by providing opportunities for staff development and incentives to expand activities.

- Strengthening the internationalisation of the university beyond cooperation with Hungarian universities.

PCU is an institution with a clear mission that shows high commitment to achieving it. The team wishes the university well and thinks that PCU needs to consolidate its current activities before thinking of expanding them. This requires that it build on its strengths in offering a quality education in a friendly and supportive environment. Therefore, it is advisable that PCU consolidates its regional position and reputation and seek the support of the research-based universities on both sides of the border.

Summary of recommendations

Governance:

➢ The university should explore every permissible avenue to simplify its structures.

➢ The university should consider making a better distinction between the role of the Founders' Council as the keeper of the university vision and values and the University Board that is responsible for the day-to-day operations of PCU. This would ensure that the Founders' Council has sufficient independence to guide the institution and vice versa.

➢ PCU should strengthen the stakeholder role of students by working with them to develop a representative association whose main mission will be to serve collectively as the voice of students. The European Student Union (ESU) or student associations in other universities in Hungary or Romania could provide some expertise in this area.

- PCU should strengthen staff development opportunities and develop incentives to encourage academic staff's involvement in applied research opportunities.

- Every legal avenue to diversify funding sources should be actively pursued in order to ensure the long-term financial stability of PCU.

- PCU need to develop more room for manoeuvre to address the deficit and create seed money funding that would allow strategic developments. This would enable PCU to develop investment plans and the incentives that are missing at the moment. In order to do so, PCU should consider changing its internal allocation model and enforce its overhead policy to capture some extra funding.

- PCU should address the weaknesses identified in its SWOT analysis.

- PCU should revise its strategic plan in the light of the following questions:
  - Starting with the mission – catering to the Hungarian minority – what are the major demographic threats faced by PCU and how can these be overcome? (These include, for instance, the demographic downturn in Romania; the attraction of the Hungarian universities across the border.)
  - What could be the regional role that PCU can play, given that the regional economy is based on services, tourism and microelectronics?
  - How can PCU capitalise on one of its strengths, the fact that its academic staff members have earned their PhDs from different universities?

- Once the priorities are established, it will be important:
  - To develop a strategic plan that can be explained in one or two pages maximum.
  - To develop an action plan with milestones, division of labour, and performance indicators.
  - To charge a committee, a unit or a person with the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the plan and report progress to the University Board. This would involve a yearly review to examine the progress achieved and to adapt the plan accordingly, while taking into account changes in the external and institutional contexts.

Teaching and learning:

- PCU needs to promote the spirit of the Bologna reforms and to introduce student-centred learning. This means that the notion of contact hours to define teachers' workload must encompass a variety of teaching techniques – not just ex cathedra lectures and seminars.

- PCU should address the dropout rate because it is fundamental to its educational mission and would improve its financial situation since funding is based on student numbers. The

first step will be to document why students drop out and, second, to develop targeted solutions.

➤ The library stock and electronic access to library material should be expanded. Possibilities for developing interlibrary cooperation with other universities in Oradea should be explored.

➤ The need to address access of mobility-impaired students is a matter of urgency. This will also benefit staff and visitors to the university.

Research:

➤ In order to increase further research capacity, CPU should focus in the first instance on developing:

- Master's level study programmes;
- Applied research on regional cross-border themes and, in general, closer links with local entrepreneurs.

➤ In order to increase its international footprint, CPU should encourage staff to publish internationally (i.e. in English) and consider this as one criterion for the annual salary bonuses and the promotions.

➤ If PCU is able to implement the recommendation to develop seed money (cf. section 2.4), this could be used to fund research-related activities, with a view of consolidating the university's capacity for interdisciplinary and applied projects focused on regional issues. The main goals would be to contribute to society and to improve PCU's standing in the region.

Service to society:

➤ Expand applied research as the avenue that would allow PCU to develop more research experience and income.

➤ In order to allow academic staff to engage in such research, PCU should look for ways to reduce both the teaching load and the administrative duties – the latter, through streamlining and simplifying the university structures.

➤ PCU should explore every opportunity to improve its links with the local community in order to increase local support.

Quality culture:

➤ To create a quality culture across the university:

- Develop user-friendly QA tools and processes;
- Use the results and explain how the results are used;
- Expand QA processes to monitor the administrative services.

Internationalisation:

➢ Develop accurate information targeted at incoming students and ensure that staff is equipped to deal with the expansion of international activities;

➢ Expand number of modules in English;

➢ Explore the possibility of joining European associations, including disciplinary networks;

➢ Develop a strategy that would address the following questions: Why internationalise? Which are the geographical targets? The topics? How to develop research capacity through internationalisation? Who should lead these developments and how to monitor them? What language policy would support this internationalisation strategy?