Romanian American University

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This report is the result of an evaluation of the Romanian-American University – Bucharest. 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, by means of 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. Romanian-American University's (RAU) profile

The Romanian-American University was founded in early 1991 with a mission to promote "the educational values of [ ] American academic education" in the context of "the rich traditions of [ ] Romanian education". It was an initiative of the late Prof. Ion Smedescu, PhD, who was also President of the oversight body, the Romanian-American Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture. In July 1991 the first admission examinations were held and 1 772 student were admitted. After a period of consolidation and development, in 2002 a new Law (no. 274) on the establishment of RAU was passed, and six schools were accredited:

- Management – Marketing
- Domestic and International Business, Banking and Finance
- Domestic and International Tourism Economy
- Computer Science for Business Management
- Law
- European Economic Studies

Masters degree study programmes were approved in 2002 and, in 2003, RAU moved to its present modern, purpose-built campus. The years 2007–2010 saw a further period of consolidation in accordance with new national laws concerning the Bologna reform process and quality assurance. Two Bachelor programmes, taught exclusively in English, were introduced in 2011. Also in 2011, RAU was legally classified as an "Education focused University", and in 2011–2012 eight RAU study programmes were formally ranked on the new national scale: two as category A, four as category B, one as category D and one as category E. According to RAU's own analysis, within the specific area of programmes in business-economics and law, these (mostly) very good programme ratings place it high among all Romanian universities.

However, in these difficult economic times, all Romanian higher education institutions face some clear challenges. For RAU in particular these include:

- Falling numbers of potential applicant students due to the national demographic trend.
- Intense competition for these students from the public as well as other private universities.
- Limitations on its capacity to differentiate and expand its present quite small research activities.

- Expansion of the linguistic capabilities of its staff.
- An increasingly constrained funding environment.

The demographic challenge is particularly acute and student numbers at RAU have been falling (from 7 958 to 5 830 to 4 861 for 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, respectively). RAU is facing this challenge by planning new study programmes and improving the quality and visibility of all programmes in an attempt to compensate for the falling numbers of potential applicants. RAU also has some particular advantages:

- An evident sense of pride with respect to its reputation in Romanian HE
- A purpose-built campus
- Good connections with a wide range of businesses
- A growing number of well established alumni
- An openness to new initiatives.

1.3. The evaluation process

The self-evaluation process was conducted at the institutional level by the following ten-person project team, which had been formally appointed by the university Senate:

- Professor Doinita Ciocîrlan, PhD Vice-Rector – strategic management, institutional quality and development, Coordinator;
- Professor Florin Bonciu, Vice-Rector – scientific research;
- Professor Valeriu Potecea PhD, Dean, School of Domestic and International Business, Banking and Finance
- Associate Professor Alexandru Ionescu PhD, Dean, School of Management-Marketing
- Associate Professor Mihai Sebea PhD, Director of the International Affairs Office
- Associate Professor Victoria Folea, Senior Researcher, Coordinator of the Research Department
- Associate Professor (Iuliana Predescu 1st SER) Iuliana Militaru PhD, Director of the Finance, Credit & Accounting Department
- Associate Professor Alexandru Tabusca PhD, Director of the IT Department
- Voichita Dragomir, Director of the Library
- Eliza Chirila, student, member of the University Senate, President of the Student Club from the Romanian-American University

The self-evaluation process drew on a wide range of inputs, some related to workshops with foreign experts but the great majority were from university officers, academic and administrative staff, students and external stakeholders.

The self-evaluation report of the RAU, together with appendices, was received by the evaluation team in early May 2013. The visits of the evaluation team to RAU took place from 20 to 22 May and from 29 September to 2 October, 2013. In between the visits RAU provided the evaluation team with a revised Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and some additional data, information and documentation. The revised report was worth the significant effort put into its preparation; it is much more clearly written and analytical, and includes examples of balanced statements of achievement and self-criticism; although not for all areas of interest, Quality Assessment Practices, for example. There will be references to it and the accompanying documentation throughout this report.

The team asked officers and staff in some schools about the extent of their awareness of, and participation in, the self-evaluation process. While all responses were affirmative, the team felt that participation was limited, particularly with respect to feedback on near-final drafts of the report. The report itself, in describing the process used, notes that "delays were recorded [ ] as regards [ ] feed-back from members of the academic community" (SER page 3). The team concurs that ensuring widespread participation in such exercises can be hard work but notes also that, within a complete IEP evaluation, the self-evaluation step is potentially the most productive step of all for an institution.

The IEP evaluation team (hereinafter "the team") consisted of:

- Professor Gülsün Saglamer, former Rector, Istanbul Technical University, Turkey, team chair
- Professor Roger P King, former Vice-Chancellor (Rector), University of Lincoln, UK
- Professor Krista Tuulik, Rector, Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences, Estonia
- Ms Liliya Ivanova, student, University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria
- Professor James P Gosling, former Director of Quality, National University of Ireland – Galway, Ireland.

The IEP team thanks: Professor Ovidiu Folcuț, Rector; Professor Doinița Ciocîrlan, Vice‐Rector for Strategic Management, Institutional Quality and Development, and Self‐assesment Coordinator; Associate Professor Mihai Sebea, Director of International Affairs, liaison person; the other members of the university management team; the deans and their staff; all the academic and administrative staff, and especially the students whom we met, for their invaluable contributions and openness in our discussions.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1. Vision, mission and values

RAU's mission is "to provide education and research at a high quality level, in an intellectually stimulating environment for both students and staff" and its vision is to "be recognised nationally and internationally as an elite university". In addition RAU gives its values as:

- To promote excellence
- Free speech and expression
- Professional, moral and social responsibility
- Creativity and innovation
- Cooperation and communication

These aims and desired attributes (SER, pages 10–11), which are commendably brief and to the point, are also eminently worthy. They are 'explained' by lists of six key enabling activities and 12 principles.

With respect to a university's mission statement, the requirements of its students and the requirements of the employers of its graduates are of fundamental relevance. It was clear to the evaluation team from its many meetings with students that they came to RAU because they anticipated (and apparently usually received) more engaged and varied teaching and experienced more active learning that at alternate institutions. At its meeting with external stakeholders, the team heard of graduate competence and success, but also of the importance in graduates of oral communication skills, awareness of good practices in the most developed economies and the highest levels of competence in English and other languages. Both employers and students were expressly aware of the importance of the ability to carry out research, but they emphasised applied research. This was understood by the evaluation team to mean that employers have a high regard for graduates who are practiced in general research methods.

These observations lead the team to pose the following questions:

- Given the current strengths in its educational activities would it be more desirable for RAU to concentrate its efforts towards furthering this strength and making its mission and vision statements more ambitious with respect to the effectiveness of teaching and learning? They could also allude to desirable aspects of teaching and learning such as (as in the strategic plan 1.4.1) "innovation, participation, creativity, motivation and team work"?

- Especially given its name, why is RAU not more ambitious (and explicitly so) with respect to offering programmes taught through English and (prerequisites for this) achieving very high levels of linguistic competence among its staff and all its students?

2.2. Governance and activities

It is clear that RAU is an organisation that generally functions well and effectively delivers education to its students. Inter-school cooperation is facilitated by the presence on school boards of representatives from other schools. The rector and members of the University Council work in adjacent areas and this facilitates regular informal contact. While recognising the importance of the rector being able to act quickly when the need arises, the team wishes to emphasise the importance of the delegation of responsibilities in any organisation. (See also Section 3.2 below.)

Before the team's preliminary visit, RAU supplied a series of four organisational charts and, then before the main visit, a new set of three revised charts. The Evaluation team believes that instead of using several charts, preparation of a new main organisational chart that reflects all decision-making processes at RAU could be a valuable exercise.

The situation at RAU with respect to income and expenditure for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012 is laid out in statements and in a series of concise tables in the SER (pages 33–36). The university Council (rector, vice-rectors, deans, general administrative manager, student representative, 'FRAPEC' representative) fixes budgets and makes decisions on their distribution and the university Senate approves them (page 33). The obvious financial challenge in the face of falling student numbers is to maintain solvency. This RAU has been able to do according to these tables, maintaining a surplus over these past three years, although a falling one. In discussions with the rector, management and staff, difficulties with finance as such never arose as an issue; rather the emphasis was more on the directly related matter of student numbers; how to maintain them, how to increase them. With respect to fees, these are €700 (page 34) and €800 (page 35) per annum for bachelor and master students, respectively. Again, the levels of fees were not raised as issues by any student in the groups of students from the six schools at RAU that the team met. When fees were mentioned by students, they stated that they could be higher in public universities – that is for students obliged to pay fees there.

2.3. Monitoring

At RAU, its compact size and the single-building campus facilitate informal communication and feedback at all levels. However, while this may be invaluable in maintaining a coherent culture, adequate formal processes are also essential to assure this culture to RAU's wide range of stakeholders, the government and, as appropriate, the general public.

From our discussions with senior management and with officers and staff in all six schools, and from the documentation supplied, it appears that institutional processes of accountability at RAU are not always formally articulated. Consequently, monitoring may be more piecemeal and less systematic than is desirable or intended.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing RAU is its falling number of students; last year (2012–2013) just 61% (4 861) of the number (7 958) three years before in 2010–2011. The demographic-dependent background to this decrease is accentuated by increasing numbers of non-completing students for both Bachelor and Master programmes in most of RAU's six schools over the same three years. In SER Annex 15 the stated target is to bring total number back up to 6 500 by 2016 but there is no mention of, nor is a target specified for, the non-completion rate.

2.4. Strategic management and capacity for change

When done well (with free contributions from all sections of staff and from external stakeholders, opportunities for discussion, feedback and recycling of draft plans) university strategic plans can be invaluable. They also need to be concise, coherently structured and, not least, explicitly associated with measurable targets. When developed with wide participation and consultation, they obtain the general consent of all staff for necessary changes. Annual operational plans — that are even more focused on measurables — enable regular review and updating, as necessary, of the strategic plan.

The team requested (and were supplied with) translations of the full RAU strategic plan, the current RAU operational plan and, for one school, its strategic and current operational plans. These are substantial documents and even include pages of tables on which the meeting of objectives can be recorded throughout each of the four quarters for all four years covered by the operational plan for the university as a whole, and, as requested, for a school, the School of Domestic and International Economy of Tourism. The team have the following comments:

- Appropriately the first and most substantial goal of the four goals of the strategic plan concerns teaching. This goal has five objectives, with "New Study Programmes" first and "Higher Quality of Teachers" last. Each objective has a number of associated actions. Most of these actions are just general statements of aspiration or intent, and lack specific details and interim target dates. Some seem out of place. An action under objective 1 implies that RAU seriously aims to "obtain the capacity of Institution organizer of Ph.D. programs" (or "2 doctoral schools" [SER Annex 15]) by summer 2016, which may be particularly challenging.

- The operational plans for both RAU and the school that were supplied to the team covered the full four years of the corresponding strategic plans. Annual operational plans were mentioned during discussions but none were provided in English.

- In summary, these plans and tables are too long and complex to be valuable practical aides in the management of change and development at RAU. There is need for a strong editorial hand to simplify early drafts, and then to maintain practicality in devising useful adjunct plans.

Ambitious but realistic plans are important but they are not really beneficial if they are not implemented; and this often involves changes in responsibilities and work practices for staff at every level. The team notes that, as well as significant strengths, the SER commendably lists a number of weaknesses, related to the 'work ethic' and willingness to take on responsibilities among some staff (SER Section II.1, page 17). Some general actions to bring about improvements are also listed. There is also a 'Human Resources Policy and processes' document (SER Annex 16.1) that includes a commitment (page 14) "to focus on motivational standards for the achievement of goals, [ ] the quality of work and [ ] compliance with the institutional system." But there is nothing directly targeted at what the real task may be, which is *change management*. In this respect, additional measures that may help could include:

- Re-training workshops for categories of staff or cohorts of staff working together.
- A substantial induction process for all new staff.

(See also under Quality Culture, Sections 6.4 and 6.5.)

2.5. Therefore, the team feels that the following recommendations may be appropriate:

- At the next opportunity, and with advice from key stakeholders, RAU's vision, mission, values and goals should be discussed and revised with an emphasis on current strengths and achievable goals.
- The roles, responsibilities and capacities of the four vice-rectorates and the Chief Operating Officer should be revisited.
- There should be a new main organisational chart that reflects actual decision-making processes, as well as any changes made in the interim.
- RAU should enhance monitoring to gain a greater understanding of student decisions related to choosing RAU and leaving.
- Given the current multiplicity of overlapping institutional strategic and operational plans, RAU should take a new, more participatory approach to planning with emphases on simplicity, consistency and cohesion, developments split into stages, metrics and explicitly allocated responsibilities.

3. Teaching and learning

3.1. Mission and goals

Although the place of teaching and learning in RAU's statements of vision, mission and values has been discussed already in the context of RAU's total mission in Section 2.1 above, it is appropriate to extend this discussion here.

The students whom the team met in all six schools consistently expressed their appreciation of the teaching, learning and external placement processes at RAU, as well as the approachability of their teachers and the inputs from external experts (from business, industry, commerce, and the professions). Also, there is some consideration (and evidence of pride) in the SER of RAU's performance in the 2011–2012 national classification of study programmes, in which RAU's programmes were mostly allocated to classes A ("a programme of excellence") and B. In Annex 18.1 of the SER there is a detailed comparative report of educational activities at RAU and at other Romanian universities (private and public) that concludes:

> From [these] analyses one can understand that the main competitors of [RAU] are in fact the public universities; there is a higher comparability in terms of study programs when compared with them than [ ] with the private universities [ ]. On the other hand, [ ] the performance [ ] of RAU [is] perfectly comparable, if not often superior, to the [public] universities classified under the categories *advanced research* or *research and education* [ ].

Therefore, one may safely assume that RAU's main strength is its teaching programmes and how they are delivered. In the present highly competitive environment and with limited resources, surely a logical approach to ongoing challenges is to build on and consolidate strengths. In fact, the strategic plan 2012–2016 does put emphasis on improving existing programmes, modernising teaching processes and enhancing teacher quality. However, there is little in the SER or in the supplied strategic or operational plans indicating *exceptional ambitions* with respect to RAU's study programmes. However, in another document, "Teaching and Research Indicators 2010–2013", SER Annex 15) there is a commitment to have two study programmes internationally certified by 2016.

3.2. Governance and activities

In many universities in the USA, the person charged with overseeing the academic enterprise of the institution is titled "the provost and senior vice-president for academic affairs" indicating the importance ascribed to the role.

At RAU, the rector, who before his appointment was vice-rector for academic affairs, now also occupies that key vice-rector role. This may be the best arrangement for the present, but

academic affairs with its need for continuous development and improvement is too large and important an area to be assigned long-term as an additional responsibility of an otherwise very busy rector. The team understand well how difficult it can be to find experienced and willing candidates for senior management roles, but the allocation to a single person of two such important ranges of responsibilities should be no more than an interim measure. With appropriate mentoring and oversight, some targeted training and an initial, limited (one-year?) period of office, a younger person with some experience of diverse external environments may be just what RAU needs to manage the development of its academic enterprise.

3.3. Monitoring

There are two aspects to the monitoring of teaching: overseeing its effective delivery and the assessment of student learning.

Our meetings indicate that this is done well at RAU. Students appeared satisfied with the overall administration of their study programmes and with the conduct of examinations, and none of the many students the team met during its visits to the six schools raised any related issues.

Evaluation of the quality of the students' learning experience is considered in Section 6.3 under Quality Culture.

3.4. Strategic management and capacity for change

An assessment of planning and the capacity for change at RAU with respect to teaching and learning must take into account not just the detailed relevant sections in the strategic and operational plans that cover 2012–2016 (SER annexes 1 and 2) but also a separate document, Teaching Strategy 2014–2020, dated July 2013 (SER annex 17.1).

This combination of shorter and longer-term plans has much to recommend it and each of the three plans has merits; for example the operational plan (2012-2016) lists a comprehensive series of actions intended to identify the needs of the labour market, graduates and potential students. However, each also has significant deficiencies, mainly related to excess length, complexity and insufficient critical revisions. (Note: some parts in RAU's plans for 2012–2016 related to teaching were used as examples in the discussion on the plan as a whole, Section 2.1 above.) Overall, as with other areas, there are too many plans to understand easily what RAU's intentions and priorities with respect to teaching really are.

However, it is clear that RAU recognises that its continued financial stability and the eventual attainment of its great ambitions depend on the development of new programmes (and improved existing programmes) that are highly attractive to students and potential employers of the graduates. RAU's plans also recognise "higher quality teachers" and "modernisation of teaching process" as essential preconditions for these goals. This is the real value of the

existing plans but all stages of these developments will require the cooperation of, and multiple inputs from, many officers and staff, as well as putting in place early on, or in advance, additional measures and enhanced supports. For example, teaching innovation depends largely on the capacities of academic staff, which may be limited without expanded resources for staff development. The relevant section of RAU's operational plan (SER annex 4, Page 17) does put emphasis on teacher training with 75 "stages" abroad for teachers envisaged by mid-2016. However, such measures may be difficult to achieve in full, and internal or local (perhaps in cooperation with sister institutions) training opportunities for much greater numbers of staff may be essential to the widespread and substantial modernisation of teaching processes at RAU by 2016, or even by 2020. It is important to keep in mind that each and every teacher/professor may need to participate in multiple training opportunities in order to achieve a consistent higher level of pedagogical effectiveness and to be able to use a range of various technologies appropriately.

The new "gr8 initiative", which is an external, business-led development aiming to facilitate students in the acquisition of high level generic skills through a range of activities involving the participating companies, was welcomed by RAU while other HEIs (the team was told) had been reluctant to participate. The team were impressed by the openness of RAU to such an initiative, which, however, is feasible in its envisaged form only because of its voluntary and extra-curricular nature. However, the external origin and nature of this scheme leads to team to make a number of points and observations:

- It is essential that RAU, while recognising and acknowledging fully the support and inputs from the external business partners, have full ownership of gr8 and exercise close oversight with respect to all of the related activities involving RAU students.

- If the scheme is executed as described to them, the team has confidence that gr8 students will benefit greatly from participating. The greatest future challenge may be to decide if and how to expand and develop it. As intimated also, each of its three main characteristics (extra-curricular, voluntary, exclusive) may be modified as its worth is proven.

- RAU's student society, the "CS-URA student club", which is also voluntary and selective, and is the vehicle for a substantial part of RAU's contributions to society, could suffer from competition from gr8, especially as and if gr8, while still "extra-curricular", is opened to students from all schools.

3.5. Therefore, the team feels that the following recommendations may be appropriate:

- Given the importance of teaching there should be a vice-rector responsible for teaching and learning.

- The team supports and encourages the planned diversification of study programmes, particularly in partnership with other institutions, multidisciplinary programmes and programmes taught through English. Great attention should be given to programme names to ensure their attractiveness as well as general accuracy.

- RAU should maintain close oversight of the very promising gr8 programme.

- Support for additional teaching skills development by staff should be enhanced and developed to assure continued improvement in teaching, and greater use of appropriate technologies.

- Support for English language development by staff should be further developed and diversified to match curricular and internationalisation ambitions.

- The adoption of a single online learning platform for the whole university should be a priority.

- Ensure the maintenance of the existing high level of student services.

4. Research

4.1. Mission and goals

Although prestige among higher education institutions (HEI) is not always linked with being "research intensive" (see the "*grandes écoles*" in France and the top "liberal arts colleges" in the US), many younger, smaller HEIs have aspirations to be recognised within a few years as general "centres of excellence" for research. Sometimes, when enormous funds are available from a government or from extremely rich sponsors, such aspirations may not be unrealistic, but, even then, achieving them can never be other than a long, slow climb. For many, the real danger is that, in over-focusing on the development of research capacity, a HEI may miss opportunities for investing sufficiently in constant improvements in teaching efficacy and in programme design. In this way they could fail also to be recognised eventually as an "elite" centre of learning, which could have been a more realistic ambition.

In Romania, these tendencies may be stimulated by the national classification system for HEIs, because many universities *not* classified as "advanced research" that have been evaluated by IEP to date have been found to be seeking to expand their research capacities, with the goal of being reclassified. But particularly under present circumstances, and even apart from financial restrictions, two unavoidable circumstances make it inevitable that the great majority will fail in this ambition:

- The limited time available for research by academic staff, who have heavy teaching loads; combined with the limited external availability of new effective and productive researchers.

- Success in applications for substantial research funding is highly dependent on "track record" i.e. previous high quality publications by the applicants.

However, given RAU's inherent advantages (Section 1.2, Page 5) — especially its good connections with a wide range of businesses, and international connections — The evaluation team believes that significant progress is possible in gradually developing specific centres for valuable research. In this the team noticed a more realistic attitude to the enhancement of research at RAU in the meeting we had with researchers than is evident in the institution's strategic plan (2012–2016) or the strategic plan for research (2014–2020).

4.2. Governance and activities

Research projects and outputs are often classified as being of local, regional, national or international significance, with the inference that this sequence is in order of importance and significance. But this is not completely true, particularly given that insights gained in a certain locality may be of great importance to the people and agencies directly concerned. In addition, such local findings may also acquire extra significance when contrasted with

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information from multiple localities in different countries. In addition, in many areas of the human and economic sciences, international projects depend on results gathered in diverse locations by local researchers recruited to an ad hoc consortium. The key here for aspirant partners is getting to know and gaining the confidence of potential leaders of such consortia. Again, local research, particularly when carried out with thoroughly validated novel or innovative methods, is a good starting point.

The researchers the team met at RAU seemed clearly aware of all the above considerations including the importance of entering partnerships at all levels and building the reputations that are so necessary for gaining the trust of potential partners, obtaining funds and becoming sustainable. The research projects being undertaken elsewhere by RAU staff working to obtain PhDs are directly relevant and may be key elements in all this. The vice-rector for research is clearly engaged in supporting staff that are carrying out, or wish to initiate, applied research at RAU.

The evaluation team requested information on research outputs by RAU staff and was supplied with numbers of current research projects (SER Annex 11) and a list of 251 research publications covering the period 2008–2012 (SER Annex 12). While it is not within the competence of an IEP team to assess the content of the research outputs of a university, comments on research performance in general are appropriate and pertinent:

- Lists of publications that are not subdivided into clearly defined categories (such as refereed articles, chapters in books, abstracts etc.) are not very informative. For example, it should be possible for a reader to distinguish easily between articles (98 in five years) and proceedings papers (153) and between more substantial (and refereed) proceedings papers and publications that are just short abstracts. This would give a more accurate view of research output.

- Many of the publications are in annals or journals that apparently publish research related to a very broad range disciplines and topics. Using these rather than more specialist media (and associated conferences) may not be the best approach to making potentially valuable national or international research contacts.

- The output of articles per year peaked at 48 in 2009. Since then numbers have fallen sharply.

- Judging from the "contracting year(s)" cited for each project in the three tables of Annex 11, the number of new projects has fallen from six to five to one for 2010, 2011 and 2012, respectively. However, the target of four grants awarded per year by 2016 in RAU's operational plan 2012–2016 (SER Annex 2, page 19) is realistic.

4.3. Monitoring

With respect to research, institutional monitoring can have two distinct aspects:

- A management tool used to assess quantitative and qualitative aspects of an institution's research activities such as the number/percentage of staff that are research active/productive, research income/expenditure, and outcomes related to investments. RAU, given its state of development, appears to be competent in these respects, and the tabulated numbers of research publications per year referred to above (SER Annex 12, page 65) is a good example of how informative this can be.

- Assessing and maximising external perceptions of the research being carried out in the institution. This involves awareness of what will actually appear in the ISI database and ensuring that all staff (including all part-time staff for whom this is possible) always use the official title and address of RAU when publishing. Otherwise articles may have no or little significance with respect to the University's research profile, or may not be regarded as an output from RAU. At least one article from 2012 in the above list is relevant in this respect.

4.4. Strategic management and capacity for change

RAU is putting great emphasis on its ambition to become, from as early as the year 2020, recognised increasingly as a "research active university" (SER page 42). The "research" sections of the strategic and operational plans (both for 2012 – 2016) are substantial and a separate longer-term research strategy 2014–2020 (SER Annex 17.2) is currently being finalised. This drew upon a detailed internally-generated research activities report dated April 2013 (SER Annex 18.2).

The longer period of the RAU research strategy 2014-2020 is appropriate but, to be most useful, this will need to be revised regularly and accompanied by short annual operational plans. Its goals and proposed actions should be more realistic and its component statements should also be sharper, more specific and more explicit. In general all documents related to research at RAU need to be much shorter, and more explicit and realistic.

Given the importance of research-informed programmes (especially Masters programmes) and that research-active teachers more often use up-to-date content, RAU's ambitions with respect to research are to be commended. However, given the current very low levels of activities and outputs, given that total resources for future developments at RAU will inevitably be limited and given that other academic areas are also in urgent need of increased resources; investments in research development should be targeted in a very limited number of specific areas and restricted to facilitating already promising researchers and topics.

4.5. Therefore, the team feels that the following recommendations may be appropriate:

- As broadly indicated in its current plans, RAU should lay out a realistic and stepwise strategy designed to gradually enhance research capacities, by:

- o Ensuring the adequacy of the research office
- o Training staff in drafting applications
- o Setting priorities for research
- o Identifying just 1–2 priority areas to be given limited internal seed funding.
- Continue enhancing and expanding training in research techniques and the roles of research projects in study programmes.

5. Service to society

5.1. Values and goals

HEIs have a special responsibility to serve the societies in which they are located; and the world as a whole. This they can do by imparting high moral and societal values to their students through the content and "orientation" of courses, by "service learning" (for example, student projects that benefit the disadvantaged) and by facilitating voluntary contributions by student and staff to beneficial services and projects. RAU's commitment to serving society is evident in its listed values (SER Page 11, #4 "Professional, moral and social responsibility") and its three fundamental "programmes" are listed as "Teaching, Research and Community Activities" (SER page 12). However, there are presently no relevant allusions in its statements of mission, identity, vision or goals. Nevertheless, SER Annex 8, which is a "draft" plan for "Community and Outreach Activities 2014–2020", commences with a brief statement of policy:

> As a University of the 21st century we will actively connect learning and research to problem-solving and service in ways that will have an impact on the world outside the university, from local to international communities. We will continue to pursue a proactive involvement of our academics, students, and staff to make meaningful contributions to societal issues at local, regional, international levels.

5.2. Governance and activities

Nothing related to "service to society" appears on any of the various organisational charts supplied to the team. However, there is a list of relevant activities in SER 1.4, page 15 and the rector as well as students whom the team met spoke with familiarity of a range of commendable voluntary projects in which students and staff participate, or plan to participate. These included support for high school students in poor regions and free legal advice centres for people with low socio-economic backgrounds. Students in the "tourism" school spoke of contributing to a restoration project in Bucovina. Overall, the team had the impression that many of the ongoing relevant student activities are organised by the "Student Club – CS-URA", which combines a range of self- and career-improvement activities with "The Christmas campaign — a yearly humanitarian campaign with [the] sole purpose of helping those in need, mostly children". They also run a seven-week project to promote the integration of international students into Romanian culture; and promote donations of blood.

If, as envisaged in the draft plan cited above, these and a range of additional activities were given a more prominent place in curricula and in general student life, they could make an important contribution to the professionalism of RAU's graduates, as well as to RAU's reputation and image.

5.3. Strategic management and capacity for change

There is an explicit commitment in the SER (Page 30) to design a "Community & Outreach Strategy for 2014–2020, and what is apparently a draft of this is included also (Annex 8). The latter contains many worthy aspirations and reads well but, like other documents that were supplied, is perhaps too long and general.

5.4. Therefore, the team feels that the following recommendations may be appropriate:

- RAU should be ambitious in developing and expanding its services and contributions to society, by both staff and students, both voluntary and via curricular elements.

6. Quality culture

6.1. Norms

The team explored the quality culture at RAU through supplied documents and discussions with central management and in the individual schools. The relevant documents included the following:

- Quality assessment practices at RAU are outlined in Section III of the SER (pages 37–39) by means of diagrams, some lists of processes, instruments and methods, and an annual timetable for the implementation of procedures. There is no account of their development over time and nothing on outcomes or improvements achieved. Unlike in the sections on teaching and on research, there is no consideration of strengths and weaknesses and there are no improvement plans. Neither is there a subsection related to quality in the conclusions section (SER pages 45–47).

- The SER also includes a statement of RAU's QA policy (SER Annex 16.2) that quotes RAU's mission, objectives, sections of the University Charter and the 2012–2016 strategic plan and continues with a series of lists of processes, policies and guidelines, including for the review and evaluation of study programs.

- The relevant sections of the strategic and operational plans 2012–2016 (SER Annexes 1 & 2) have the same merits and limitations as the entire plans.

- There was also a separate Quality report (SER Annex 5) that includes descriptions of processes, including how teachers are evaluated, but no data and nothing on outcomes.

- The most substantive document supplied was the "Procedure regarding the Faculty Evaluation" (*First version of SER* Annex 13). This included concise accounts of "Activities, responsibilities and observations" and a set of forms to be used as student questionnaires, for teacher self-evaluation, peer evaluation and evaluation by a head of department.

Overall, for all its volume, the documentation supplied was not as informative or complete as would have been desirable.

All discussions with management, staff and students were on the basis that quality procedures for the evaluation of teachers were in operation. Students expressed general satisfaction with their operation and outcomes. However, there was not always agreement between different groups interviewed on the actual frequency of student questionnaire procedures or on the full four-part evaluations of teachers. "Slow process of updating the system of evaluating teachers' performance" is listed as main weakness in the conclusions section of the SER (page 45).

Summarising, the norm at RAU is that everybody — the rector, management, staff and students — believes that quality processes are important and useful. A comprehensive procedure for the holistic assessment of teachers has been developed and is in use. However, the processes described have not been fully implemented universally.

6.2. Governance and activities

Governance of quality assurance at RAU is effective in the development or drafting of policies and procedures, for example the "Procedure regarding the Faculty Evaluation" referred to above, or for the periodic review of study programmes and administrative staff (SER page 37). However, taking the evaluation of teaching as an example, it appears to be less so with respect to routine operation. Perhaps feedback from administrators and staff has not been used sufficiently to decide on changes that would have made universal implementation more feasible. Perhaps also there is a need for a "director of quality" (equivalent to the Director of International Affairs) to operate and further develop quality procedures under the authority of the vice-rector for Strategic Management, Quality and Institutional Development.

6.3. Monitoring

As described (*First version of SER* Annex 13) RAU's four-part holistic process for regular teacher evaluations is impressive in its comprehensiveness and balance. Systematically and responsibly implemented with respect to suitable defined standards, this could ensure constantly improving standards of teaching and learning. It involves four types of input:

- Self-evaluation by means of a standard questionnaire covering teaching activities, research activities and outputs

- Peer evaluation by means of a standard questionnaire covering: teaching activities; involvement in departmental activities; ability to communicate and interact with colleagues; availability to students, peers and administrative staff; research activities and outputs; and administrative activities

- A range of four feedback questionnaires for Master or Bachelor students taking courses/teaching and seminars/laboratory classes

- A form to facilitate summary evaluations by department directors/heads. This allows for direct comments on teaching and research, for views on the feedback from peers and from students, and an overall summary.

However, it would have been helpful if the team had seen tabulated results of the outcomes of these assessments.

While teacher evaluation appears to be the main routine quality assurance/improvement procedure at RAU, the references cited above (SER page 37 and Annex 16.2) indicate that a wide range of other procedures are in place or planned. Internal procedures that assure the

quality of study programmes with respect to the singular ambitions and standards of RAU are potentially very important and this is recognised by RAU.

Students in a number of schools spoke positively of a high proportion of teachers *informally* seeking feedback and making improvements. This is to be commended and encouraged for all teachers.

6.4. Strategic management and capacity for change

Since there are so many interdependencies between governance, planning and quality management and improvement, some points made throughout this report are also relevant here. Two may be most relevant:

- This Report, Section 2.4: The issues related to the "work ethic" and willingness to take on responsibilities among some staff (SER Section II.1, page 17) are of fundamental relevance to the development of a quality culture (where, in principle and as much as possible in daily practice) all staff at all levels act to ensure high and consistent standards in all that they do.

- This Report, Section 3.4: Here the importance of strategic and operational plans being "lean and functional tools" was stressed. This applies particularly to all aspects of planning for quality improvement.

6.5. Therefore, the team feels that the following recommendations may be appropriate:

- In reviewing the performance of its quality systems, RAU should consider whether significant improvements in effectiveness could be achieved by the creation of a new role of "director of quality" to assist the vice-rector for strategic management, quality and institutional development.

- With respect to its goals with regard to high quality and new innovative study programmes, RAU will benefit from the systematic implementation of its internal procedures that assure the quality of study programmes. To conform to good practice these should always have external/international inputs.

- The team commend the teachers who informally seek feedback and make improvements, and feel that RAU and its constituent schools and departments should act to make this practice more common and eventually universal.

- Initiate efforts to disseminate a quality culture that is integrated more fully at every level throughout the university. These could include a system of training workshops with the participation of all staff over a period of, say, two years; and substantial induction training for all new staff.

7. Internationalisation

7.1. Mission and goals

RAU's commitment to internationalisation is clear and evident: its name and statement of identity emphasise the United States, its expanding Asian Studies department indicates a strong commitment to the East and its many less-distant associations are understandably mainly European. RAU's relevant stated goal is: "Dynamic internationalisation process, with new partnerships and networks with universities." In addition to the "Internationalisation" sections in the strategic and operational plans 2012–2016, there is also a longer-term "2014–2020 Internationalisation Strategy" (SER Annex 17.3). As with the plans discussed in earlier section of this report, there are too many generalities and a deficiency of focus in these documents. Of course it may be too early to favour any of the many existing options over others, and the commitment and enthusiasm of staff and partners must be respected, but RAU cannot possibly achieve all its implied ambitions in this area.

7.2. Governance and activities

The team understands that the director of international affairs reports to the vice-rector for strategic management, quality and institutional development and oversees a range of academic aspects related to joint programmes and incoming and outgoing students. Given RAU's commitment and ambitions related to internationalisation, a revision of the responsibilities in this area may be justified to ensure informed and competent management when strategic decisions and difficult choices have to be made. (See also below under 7.3. Monitoring.)

Repeatedly during its two visits, the evaluation team heard of RAU's participation in Erasmus and other exchange and mobility programmes and that this is much greater in proportion to its size than would be expected. Probably because a very high proportion of the staff and students the team met were English speaking, most of these had availed of such schemes to travel and learn abroad. They were all highly appreciative of the benefits they gained.

Numbers of first year international students on Bachelor programmes in the "business" school have doubled in the last three years, while the numbers in "computer science" have increased substantially, although from a very low base. In contrast, numbers in the other schools have fallen sharply (SER Annex 10). Surely this is indicative of the effects of the programmes delivered via English in these schools. It is an objective of the "tourism" school to have double-degrees with foreign universities and they should be given every support in this. In contrast, numbers of international Master students have fallen by over 70% in the same period, pointing to lost opportunities related to the continuing total lack of any Master programmes in English (or any other foreign language) even in RAU's high quality brochure "Study Guide for International Students, 2013–2014".

On the other hand, RAU is to be complimented on its now long-established series of summer schools in cooperation with the University of Alabama in Huntsville, that started in 2005. Participant numbers are small (range, 15–39 since 2008) but stable. Perhaps this is a category of international activity that realistically could be expanded and diversified.

7.3. Monitoring

Accepting ideas and help for new initiatives and keeping many options open is desirable and feasible when they are of clear, even if limited, benefit, are very low cost and managerially relatively self sufficient. However, as some will need investment to expand and contribute more substantially to RAU's mission, their longer-term potential within RAU's strategic development should to be assessed regularly. At all times senior management should be aware of the costs and benefits of the external programmes in which RAU participates as well as for each of the special centres within the Asian Studies and other relevant departments.

7.4. Strategic management and capacity for change

As with research, the longer period of the RAU internationalisation strategy 2014-2020 is appropriate but again, to be most useful, this will need to be revised regularly and accompanied by short annual operational plans. Its component statements should also be sharper and more to the point.

7.5. Therefore, the team feels that the following recommendations may be appropriate:

- RAU should continue to act to ensure that the director of internationalisation is sufficiently informed of the costs, benefits and potential of all relevant units so that s/he is in a position to provide sound advice when investment decisions must be made to promote specific aspects of internationalisation.

- Clear objectives and visibility within international networks should be re-enforced.

- Extracurricular activities should be encouraged, and if necessary subsidised, in order to support English language consolidation and development (from good to excellent as well as from moderate to good) among students.

- Integration of international students into the wider university community should be prioritised.

8. Conclusion

In summary, the team feels that the following recommendations may be appropriate:

With respect to: Governance and institutional decision-making:

- At the next opportunity, and with advice from key stakeholders, RAU's vision, mission, values and goals should be discussed and revised with an emphasis on current strengths and achievable goals.

- The roles, responsibilities and capacities of the four vice-rectors and the Chief Operating Officer should be revisited.

- There should be a new main organisational chart that reflects actual decision-making processes, as well as any changes made in the interim.

- RAU should enhance monitoring to gain a greater understanding of student decisions related to choosing RAU and leaving.

- Given the current multiplicity of overlapping institutional strategic and operational plans, RAU should take a new more participatory approach to planning with emphases on simplicity, consistency and cohesion, developments split into in stages, metrics and explicitly allocated responsibilities.

With respect to teaching and learning:

- Given the importance of teaching there should be a vice-rector responsible for teaching and learning.

- The IEP team supports and encourages the planned diversification of study programmes, particularly in partnership with other institutions, multidisciplinary programmes and programmes taught through English. Attention should be given to programme names to ensure their attractiveness as well as general accuracy.

- RAU should maintain close oversight of the very promising gr8 programme.

- Support for additional teaching skills development by staff should be enhanced and developed to assure continued improvements in teaching and greater use of appropriate technologies.

- Support for English language development by staff should be further developed and diversified to match curricular and internationalisation ambitions.

- The adoption of a single online learning platform for the whole university should be a priority.

- Ensure the maintenance of the existing high level of student services.

With respect to research:

- As broadly indicated in its current plans, RAU should lay out a realistic and stepwise strategy designed to gradually enhance research capacities, by:
  - Ensuring the adequacy of the research office
  - Training staff in drafting applications
  - Setting priorities for research
  - Identifying just 1–2 priority areas to be given limited internal seed funding.
- Continue enhancing and expanding training in research techniques and the roles of research projects in study programmes.

With respect to Service to Society:

- RAU should be ambitious in developing and expanding its services and contributions to society, by both staff and students, both voluntary and via curricular elements.

With respect to Quality Culture:

- In reviewing the performance of its quality systems, RAU should consider whether significant improvements in effectiveness could be achieved by the creation of a new role of "director of quality" to assist the vice-rector for strategic management, quality and institutional development.
- With respect to its goals with regard to high quality and new innovative study programmes, RAU will benefit from the systematic implementation of its internal procedures that assure the quality of study programmes. To conform to good practice these should always have external/international inputs.
- The team commends the teachers who informally seek feedback and make improvements, and feels that RAU and its constituent schools and departments should act to make this practice more common and eventually universal.
- Initiate efforts to disseminate a quality culture that is integrated more fully at every level throughout the university. These could include a system of training workshops with the participation of all staff over a period of, say, two years; and substantial induction training for all new staff.

With respect to internationalisation:

- RAU should continue to act to ensure that the director of internationalisation is sufficiently informed of the costs, benefits and potential of all relevant units so that s/he is in a position to provide sound advice when investment decisions must be made to promote specific aspects of internationalisation.

- Clear objectives and visibility within international networks should be re-enforced.

- Extracurricular activities should be encouraged, and if necessary subsidised, in order to support English language consolidation and development (from good to excellent as well as from moderate to good) among students.

- Integration of international students into the wider university community should be prioritised.

9. Envoi

At the university commencement ceremony on 1 October 2013, the rector spoke of how modern universities, and this would apply most strongly to young ambitious universities, "must adapt as quickly as possible to the changing circumstances in the World". The World Bank findings on low levels of higher educational qualifications that he quoted show that a diversified, internationalised RAU that is committed to high social values, is necessary in Romania. The IEP team endorse these sentiments.